

TESTS

CAR GPS
HOME THEATRE
DISHWASHERS
DISHWASHER
DETERGENT
CROSSTRAINERS
CORDLESS PHONES
BATTERIES
MASCARA

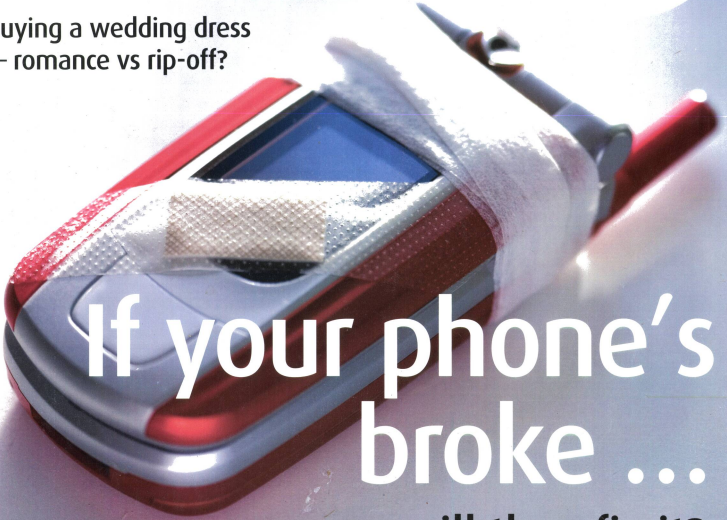
choice

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2007
choice.com.au

10 foods to make your
children fat

Buying a wedding dress
— romance vs rip-off?

NEW LOOK!
MORE PAGES!



If your phone's
broke ...

... will they fix it?



Jane Mackenzie
Editor

More pages, new look

If your copy of CHOICE looks and feels different this month, that's because it is.

First, we've given you eight extra pages — a total of 60 — with more tests, reports and regular columns than before. We've managed to do this without raising the price and are happy that CHOICE is even better value than before.

Then there's the new look. Since October last year you've seen the new logo on the front cover — and thank you for the many comments on it, fortunately most of them saying you like it. Now we've overhauled the design of the whole magazine.

All magazines do this every so often — styles change and readers expect us to stay contemporary and look modern. Our last major redesign was back in 2001. But we've tried to do more than just make the pages look good.

With CHOICE tests in particular, we've tried to make it easier to find your way around: find the bits you're most interested in, quickly see how we tested, get good, big photos of the recommended models and easily read the table.

When planning the redesign, we did a major research project with some CHOICE subscribers, asking them what they liked about the style and layout of the magazine already, and what they thought could benefit from some change. What they said was the backbone of the thinking behind this redesign, and thanks to all of you who took part.

We hope you like the new look and find it makes getting what you want from articles even easier. We'd love to hear your comments — please email redesign@choice.com.au or call our Consumer Services people on 1800 069 552. I'll look forward to hearing from you.

Coming soon ...

Espresso machines

More new machines for people who just can't live without their coffee.



Fresh vs frozen vs canned vegies

Does corn by any other process still taste as sweet?



Out for a stroll...

Which strollers won't fall apart on you?



about choice

No advertising, no bias ... just reliable, expert advice.

CHOICE is a non-profit, non-party-political organisation, established in 1959 to provide consumers with information and advice on goods, services, health and personal finances, and to help maintain and enhance your quality of life. It's a Council member of Consumers International.

100% independent. We accept no advertisements, receive no government funding and don't take industry freebies. Our income is solely from the sale of CHOICE and our other publications and services. All the products we put through full testing are bought by us in the marketplace, except occasionally, to get the latest model, we may buy directly from a manufacturer where we can select a random sample. We never accept gifts for testing from manufacturers or retailers, though we sometimes borrow samples, especially of new products, for quick reviews. There are no hidden agendas and our recommendations are completely impartial — we simply road-test products and services so that consumers don't get ripped off.

We test and rate products and services. Our ratings are based on quality without regard to price, and are derived from lab tests, expert judgments and reader surveys. If a product is high in quality and relatively low in price, we deem it a Best Buy. A rating applies only to the brand and model tested, not to other models sold under the same brand name, unless so noted.

Representing your interests. We lobby and campaign on behalf of consumers to promote your rights, to influence government policy, and to ensure consumer issues have a high profile in the public arena.

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Behind the Vista hype

Get ready for heaps of hype as the Microsoft marketing machine kicks into gear to promote Vista, the latest version of the Windows computer operating system.

Due for release at the end of January, Vista is designed to give your PC a major facelift, with a bold new look that showcases transparency and other fancy visual elements. Importantly, it also increases security to help prevent changes that could harm your computer.

Vista comes in five versions: Basic and Premium for home users; Business for small to medium businesses; Enterprise for corporate users; and Ultimate for those who want advanced networking, security and multimedia all in one.

You'll need a powerful PC to see Vista in its full glory, though, and a higher-level version than Vista Home Basic, which doesn't support all the new graphic features.

Useful additions to Vista include Instant Search, designed to make lost files a thing of the past, and Parental Controls, which let you restrict children's access to programs, web pages and games. Parents can also set time limits for use and view reports of what their children

have been doing on the PC.

Don't just rush out and get Vista without further thought, though. You might be better off sticking with what you have until it's been out for a while and potential problems are sorted out, or until you're ready to buy a new PC that comes with Vista.

The full report on Vista is available in the Jan/Feb 2007 issue of *CHOICE Computer*. To subscribe call 1800 069 552 toll-free or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines.



A SAD LOSS

We were saddened by the passing of Dr John Hirshman, a long-time voting

member and ex-councillor of the Australian Consumers' Association, on 20 June 2006.

Dr Hirshman had a distinguished career in public health, working for 16 years with the World Health Organization, primarily in South East Asia and the Pacific. He also worked as a health consultant to AusAID, UNICEF and the Red Cross, and founded the health-focused aid agency SHARE (Support for Health for All in our Region). He became a Member of the Order of Australia in 1993.

Dr Hirshman served on the ACA council from 1982 to 1993 and was a life member. We've donated \$500 to the John Hirshman International Health and Population Studies Fund at the University of NSW in his memory.

BYE-BYE, BANKCARD

Australia's oldest bank-issued credit card scheme, Bankcard, has stopped operating. All Bankcards were withdrawn from use before 31 December 2006.

Bankcard was launched in 1974 as a joint venture between nine Australian banks. Because of a declining cardholder base, shrinking market share and falling transaction volumes the scheme was phased out over 2006.

Darrell from Sydney got his first Bankcard over 20 years ago when he was 22. "It was a convenient way to pay, for example, when going out for dinner. At that time EFTPOS wasn't around.

"I got about two or three reminder

letters from my bank offering me a MasterCard instead."

If you still have a Bankcard you won't be able to use it any more. If you haven't already done so, check your last statement for any regular payments from your card, such as magazine subscriptions and regular charity donations (CHOICE sent out over 3500 reminders in November to subscribers who hadn't given us an alternative yet.) Contact the service provider and give them the details of an alternative credit card, or arrange a direct debit from your bank account.

Darrell declined the offer of a new credit



GENE ROSS

card from his bank: "I mainly use EFTPOS now. I had hardly used my Bankcard in the last few years — the only regular payment was for my life insurance and I changed that over to a direct debit from my bank account."

Toppling TVs a big risk for kids

A significant number of injuries and even deaths have been caused by TVs falling onto children, both in Australia and overseas. We've reported on this previously in CHOICE, but it seems it's a bigger problem than you might think.

Children under five are particularly at risk. Injuries can happen if youngsters climb on furniture and try to haul themselves up by holding onto the TV, causing it to topple and fall on them. From 2000 to 2005 the US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) reported 36 TV tipover-related deaths. For 2005 alone the CPSC estimates that at least 3000 children under five were treated in US hospital emergency rooms because of a TV tipover.

CHOICE tests TVs for their stability. Our most recent tests (CHOICE, March, August and December 2006) found the new plasma TVs tested to be safe, but we still found two new LCD

TVs failing one of the stability tests.

CHOICE is working with Standards Australia to improve the test for TV stability. Standards Australia has now proposed an amendment to the Australian standard for safety requirements for TVs, adding:

- A required restraining/fixing device and installation instructions.
- A strength test for the device.
- A mandatory warning label to advise of the hazards if the TV isn't positioned in a sufficiently stable location.

Meanwhile you can take the following steps to prevent accidents:

- Place your TV on sturdy furniture with a wide, deep base suitable for its size. Don't use unsuitable furniture like a chest of drawers, bookcase or trolley.



- Push the TV as far back as possible.
- Don't put items like toys or the remote control on top of it, tempting children to climb up to reach them.
- Check for manufacturer instructions on how you might secure the TV.
- If there's an anchor point on the back of the TV, fix it to a stable surface — but don't try to create a DIY anchor point.

Don't be (mis)led up the garden path

It's easy for a manufacturer to give the wrong impression about a product's 'environmental friendliness'. For example, a company may promote a single quality of the product that's environmentally preferable (such as using less water) but ignore its other harmful features (like using more energy). Or it may use words like 'biodegradable' without showing how much of the product degrades, what it degrades into or how long the process takes.

So if you want to choose a 'greener' product, how can you be sure you're not being sucked in by a bit of greenwash? An international voluntary labelling code has been set up to help consumers identify environmentally preferable products and services. In Australia, it's called the Good Environmental Choice (GEC) label — see right. The body responsible for administering this label is the non-profit, non-government organisation, Good Environmental Choice Australia (GECA, formerly the Australian Environmental Labelling Association or AELA).

To get a licence to use the label, the product's entire lifecycle — its ingredients and how they're acquired, its manufacture, packaging, use and disposal — is assessed by GECA to make sure it conforms to international environmental labelling standards. A company using the label must pay a verification and licence fee, and is also audited by GECA during its licence period. For more information about environmental labelling and the products using this label, go to www.geca.org.au.

A fairly recent example of labelling that could put consumers on

the wrong track was the subject of an inquiry by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC). It found that some of Environmental Marketing Pty Ltd's cosmetics, marketed as the ENVIROCARE brand, either contained ingredients such as foaming agents and preservatives that weren't listed on the labels, or had ingredients listed in an incorrect order.

ENVIROCARE is marketed as being

"... biodegradable, earth-friendly and without harmful chemicals or perfumes". The ACCC said in a press release that companies promoting themselves in this way have even greater responsibility to "to ensure consumers are not misled".

Trade Practices regulations say manufacturers should list all ingredients on the labelling, in descending order of amount. Knowing what ingredients a product contains is especially important for people with allergies.

Environmental Marketing says it has now recalled all product from shelves, relabelled existing stock and completed practical training on trade practices, as directed by the ACCC. It says it's also reformulated and changed manufacturers to one with an accredited compliance standard.



CHOICE/cuts



Stainless steel cutlery rusting?

Can stainless steel cutlery be safely washed in the dishwasher? And if it says dishwasher-safe, why do I still get rust spots on some knife blades? Do I have to go 'top-of-the-range' and pay big bucks or will reasonably priced stainless steel cutlery resist rust? What do the ratings mean? Prompted by your repeated queries on this topic, here's a brief overview of the most important points.

Stainless steel is a steel to which chrome has been added for rust resistance and often nickel for acid resistance. Top-quality stainless steel (18/10) contains 18% chrome and 10% nickel. It's generally more expensive, and brighter and whiter in colour, than lower-grade 13/0 stainless steel, which can look quite grey and is also more magnetic than higher-grade. Lower-quality stainless steel has a higher tendency to rust. Despite its name, most metal alloys used in cutlery make it

'stain-resistant' rather than 'stainless'.

While most forks and spoons have excellent corrosion resistance, knife blades tend to be made of harder steel that gives a lasting edge but is more likely to rust, eventually, from repeated washing in a dishwasher. The hints below can help you minimise this risk.

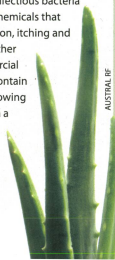
- Don't leave acidic and salty food remnants on cutlery. They can stain it, so rinse the pieces off before you put them in the dishwasher, especially if you don't run it immediately.
- Don't store dirty cutlery in your dishwasher for days.
- Don't leave washed and wet cutlery in the dishwasher overnight. Open the door when the cycle's finished to assist drying, or take it out and wipe it dry straight after the program finishes.

- Don't overpack the cutlery basket. Use a grid, if possible, so items don't touch each other. It's particularly important that stainless steel and silver-plated or copper items don't come in contact, as the chemical reaction with hot water and dishwashing detergent can cause discolouration.
- Don't wash cutlery with wooden, plastic, bone or china handles in the dishwasher regularly, unless it's labelled dishwasher-safe.
- Don't pour dishwasher detergent directly onto cutlery. Silver-plated cutlery can become permanently stained; stainless steel can pit within minutes.
- Don't soak cutlery for long periods in soapy water, bleach solutions or salt water.
- Don't use coarse, abrasive cleaning aids. Stains such as water marks can generally be wiped off easily from knife blades, and for more persistent rust stains, use a non-abrasive metal cleaning paste or liquid (for stainless steel, not a silver cleaner), if necessary. For rainbow-like stains, use lemon juice.
- Experts generally recommend washing good-quality knives by hand. Apart from risking rust stains, their sharp edges can deteriorate in the dishwasher as they get bumped into other dishes, cutlery, or against the rack, all of which can blunt the blades. And, of course, it's safer not to have sharp knives hidden in among the rest of the cutlery.

WORLD CONSUMER SNAPSHOT

ALOE TO THE RESCUE

The healing properties of aloe vera are promoted in many products, especially for after-sun care, as it provides cool, soothing relief to sunburnt skin. The US *Consumer Reports on Health* reports on test-tube studies that have shown the substances in aloe vera gel can kill infectious bacteria and fungi and block chemicals that help cause inflammation, itching and pain signalling. But rather than buying a commercial product, which may contain little aloe, consider growing your own aloe plant in a pot. Simply break off a bit of leaf and squeeze the gel from the broken edge onto your skin.



AUSTRIAL FR

MUSIC EVERYWHERE

If your Speedos or bikini don't have a belt to clip your MP3 player to, you might be interested in one of the gadgets our German counterparts reviewed: a pair of sunnies with inbuilt MP3 player. They look pretty cool with their silver-coloured frame, brown lenses and thick, chunky sides that house an integrated MP3 player capable of storing up to eight hours of music. The player sounds relatively good and the glasses offer sufficient UV protection, but usability of the gadget is pretty limited, says *Test* magazine: it would be too dangerous to wear while driving or bike riding, its earphones tend to slip off while walking, so there's really only lying on the beach or in the hammock left where it could come in handy.

And for the powder room (what the Germans call the 'quiet little place') there's another 'comfortable multimedia solution': a toilet roll holder combined with a docking station. Put your iPod into the iCarb with inbuilt speakers and ... no more quiet in this little place! But don't forget to take off your music sunnies first, *Test* remarks.

CORRECTIONS

SPARKLING WINE

CHOICE, December 2006

In the table that accompanied our article on sparkling wine and champagne (page 20), the price and score columns were printed incorrectly for the JACOBS CREEK Reserve Chardonnay Pinot Noir 2004. It received a score of 15.5 and was priced \$11.30 (if purchased by the dozen) and \$11.90 (single bottle).

PLASMA TVS

CHOICE, December 2006

In the table on page 34 the resolution of the PHILIPS 42PF9531/79 was incorrect. Its resolution is 1024 x 1080 pixels.



High-definition confusion

I have recently been looking at high-definition TVs and have noticed that the adverts are very misleading. They regularly advertise high-definition (HD) TVs that are really TVs with an HD screen but an analogue tuner. Surely we need to get some standard as to what can be called a high-definition TV. An HD TV should be one with an HD screen and internal HD tuner. All the others should have a reasonable description of their capabilities, for example an HD or standard-definition (SD) screen, with or without an analogue tuner and digital input capability. And surely screens that don't have a tuner at all should not be called TVs, but just display screens.

Colin, WA

As we said in our last test of HD plasma TVs (CHOICE, December 2006), we think it's a mess for consumers in the digital TV market at the moment. We agree

with Colin that manufacturers should be required to clearly explain the features of their TVs. At the very least manufacturers should be complying with the Digital Television Marketing Code, and we think the code should be strengthened so that a TV can't be marketed as high-definition unless it has an HD screen, integrated HD tuner and digital audio output.

Changing statements

When my July Westpac credit card statement arrived it looked different somehow. When I looked for the total balance owed I had trouble finding it. Then I realised that what was different about the statement was that the running balance had disappeared from the statement. Previously there had been a debit/credit column and a balance column; now there is a debit column and a credit column and no balance column. This means there's no cumulative balance and you have to look

very hard to find the closing balance. I'm concerned this will mean more people will get into credit card debt because they're not able to keep track of their spending as they go.

I registered my concern about the new system with the bank first by email, which only got an automated "your complaint has been received" reply, then by phone to the customer relations department. I've since had a phone call back from there with the suggestion that I help anyone I was concerned about to set up a spreadsheet to track their own spending! No explanation has been given about why the bank has taken this action or any reassurances given that it will change back to the old system.

Sheena Edwards

We contacted Westpac, which says it made some changes to its statements in 2006, including moving from a credit/debit column and a balance column and instead having a separate debit and credit column — the idea being to make it easier for customers to differentiate between the two. Clearly, though, different people have different opinions about the usefulness of the layout. Due to systems constraints, Westpac says it can't have more than two columns

THUMBS UP!

- Ketta, via email, would like to give a 'Thumbs up' to SUNBEAM. When she accidentally 'blended' a teaspoon she'd left in her blender she snapped the shaft. She called customer care and 'fessed up that the problem was her fault, and was delighted when SUNBEAM still sent out a replacement blade assembly at no charge.
- Simon, from Clayton, Victoria, recently received a SAMSONITE High Sierra daypack as a gift, but one day when he was using it and pulled one of the straps it came away from the bag. He took the bag into SAMSONITE, which replaced it with a new one without question.

on the statement and thinks customers can still easily view their closing balance by looking at the summary provided at both the beginning and end of the statement.

More info on aged care

I am writing to make you aware of a resource that was not acknowledged in your article *Regarding nursing homes* (CHOICE, September 2006).

www.agedcareonline.com.au is an online directory of aged care providers across Australia. The website also has a vacancy register that lists current vacancies in aged care facilities. This site is free to the general public and allows them to research aged care alternatives available in their local area.

Ben Hannemann

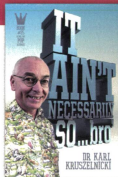
Unfortunately there's never enough space to mention all sources of good information for our readers. Another website worth checking out on this topic is www.dpsguide.com.au.

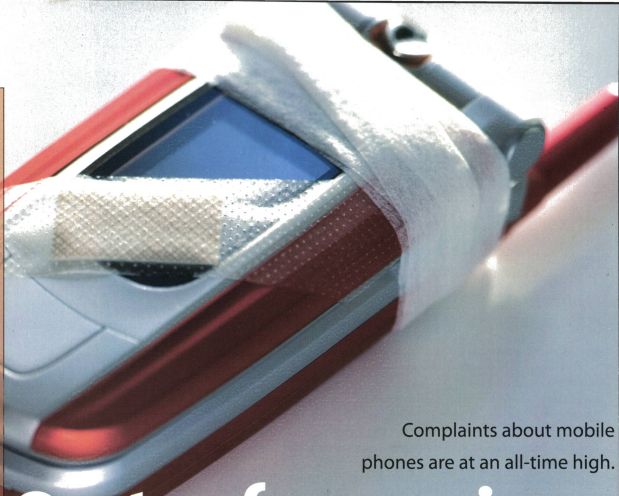
LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us too. Address these letters to Thumbs up at the address on page 2.

To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Colin from WA, receives *It ain't necessarily so*, Bra, or any other book of his choice from www.choice.com.au/books.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us.





Complaints about mobile phones are at an all-time high.

Out of service

IN A NUTSHELL

- CHOICE tests of mobile phones generally find they're robust and reliable, but when something goes wrong, repair times and customer service can leave a lot to be desired.
- Some consumers who contacted us had been denied their legal rights and given misleading and inaccurate information.
- The company that sells the phone is legally responsible for providing a refund, replacement or repairs.

Having your \$900 mobile phone break down after a week is bad enough, but how would you feel if the shop gave you incorrect and misleading information about your warranty rights, refused to give you a replacement and left you phoneless for over a month? And if the phone was sent for repairs four times but still came back faulty?

That was the experience of Jeanne, one of the many readers who told us about their difficulties dealing with shops, manufacturers and telcos. With people now so dependent on their mobiles, knowing how to assert your rights if things go wrong is vital.

Complaints reach boiling point

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) receives more complaints about telcos than any other industry, with a substantial number relating to mobiles. And in the last year, complaints about mobiles to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) jumped by 29% to over 52,000 — a staggering 1000 complaints per week on average. And that followed an 88% increase in the previous year. (Those figures include complaints about issues such as billing, premium SMS services and privacy, which we don't look at in this report).

Customer service standards in particular seem to be on the slide: complaints increased by 107% in 2005–06, on the back of a 145% increase in 2004–05. Faulty mobile phones are a problem too, with over 7400 complaints — “remarkably high when compared with internet and landline categories,” according to the TIO.

The industry, through the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA), argues the increase in complaints about faults is due to changes in how the TIO records complaints. It also says the overall number of complaints represents a fraction (0.3%) of Australian mobile subscribers. To us, though, that's still 52,000 unhappy customers. (There are 19.8 million mobile services, with 79% of consumers owning or using a mobile).

To find out more about the difficulties consumers face, we asked online and magazine readers to tell us about the problems they'd experienced when their phone needed repairing. Customer service isn't always bad, but overall the 80 or so emails and letters included many stories of poor standards of customer service, lengthy repair times and a host of other problems.

Biggest gripes

- **Long waiting times** You'd probably expect to wait a week or two if your mobile needed to be sent to a

manufacturer or repair centre. However, many readers had to wait four or five weeks and some even several months to get their phone back. Unlike fixed-line services, there's no industry-wide benchmark or customer service guarantee for mobile repair times.

- **No loan phone** Being phoneless for weeks or months is a pain and retailers aren't obliged to provide a loan phone (some do, though you may need to leave a deposit).
- **Denied your rights** In July 2006, following an action by the ACCC, the Federal Court found that LG Electronics had made false or misleading statements about consumers' warranty rights. Our research found that retailers sometimes provide misleading information too, including incorrect statements about consumers' right to a refund, repair or replacement.
- **Bad service and ineffective repairs** We were contacted by consumers who'd returned their phones three or four times — and some still didn't work.
- **Given the runaround** Readers told us how retailers, manufacturers and service providers seemed unwilling to take responsibility for the problems.
- **Blamed for damage** Often, consumers believed they weren't at fault for their damaged phones, but manufacturers' warranties often exclude common problems like liquid or physical damage (more on this below).
- **Details lost** Consumers sometimes found their repaired or replaced phone had been wiped of contacts lists, photos and other personal information. We'd recommend backing up your details from both SIM and phone memory (options include using a SIM reader, simply copying the details onto your computer or paper, or using a SIM back-up service — contact your service provider for more). It's not a bad idea even if your phone isn't going in for repair, in case it's lost or stolen.
- **Contract lock-ins** Consumers are forced to pay monthly fees even when they've no phone to use while theirs is being repaired — in some cases, they have to continue to pay for faulty phones that can't be used or fixed.

Restricted warranties and liquid damage

Manufacturers' warranties contain significant exclusions that leave some consumers wondering what exactly is covered. And these warranties usually only last one year; you'd expect phones to last a lot longer. (In fact the statutory 'implied warranty' may still apply if your phone is fairly new — see *Know your rights*, page 10, for more on this.)

Exclusions include wear and tear, liquid damage and physical damage (even when there's disagreement about whether the consumer was at fault). Liquid damage seems a particular cause for concern. Phone technicians can identify with certainty when liquid has seeped into a phone; the problem for consumers is it's impossible to prove it wasn't their fault. Several told us they'd never

immersed their phone in water or caused liquid damage through misuse.

A large retailer agreed that users aren't always to blame. "Most handsets can't stand excessively dusty or moist conditions," the company said. "If you spend all day on the phone and have particularly sweaty hands, for example, the handset could be damaged or fail."

This retailer also said incidences of and complaints about liquid damage can be higher in parts of the country where there's higher humidity. The TIO doesn't record liquid damage complaints in a separate category from other faults, and was unable to verify this claim. AMTA says high humidity and rain can corrode phones' electronic circuits; its website (see right) has tips for avoiding such damage.

Flippin' hell!

Nicolle's Nokia was damaged not by being dropped, but because its 'flip' opening mechanism caused the case to eventually crack. "The local Telstra Shop sent it to be repaired," Nicolle says. "The salesperson said they'd received numerous Nokia phones in warranty with the same problem." (Nokia, on the other hand, says there's no 'manufacturing issue' with this particular phone or its flip mechanism.) >

Wrong information

Within two weeks of purchase, Anaree's phone started to continually switch itself off, requiring the date and time to be reset each time it was restarted. She took it back to the retailer. "The salesman disappeared for about half an hour, eventually returning to say everyone at the phone manufacturer was 'in a meeting'," Anaree says. "He next said I couldn't return the phone as it wasn't in its original box. He said I had to keep the box for at least a year just in case the phone needed to be returned."

The salesman also claimed that all mobile phones switch themselves off and need to have the date and time re-entered on restarting, which is clearly nonsense. Anaree disputed these statements and the salesman promised to contact her after he'd spoken to the manufacturer. "I didn't hear anything for several days so I telephoned the shop and asked for the manager. I was told the manager wasn't available but would call me. He never returned my call."

Anaree contacted Consumer Affairs, which confirmed she didn't need to return the phone in its original box. "They suggested I write a letter to the retailer, but due to work and other pressures I haven't had time."

MIND YOUR MOBILE

It's worth taking some extra precautions with your phone, given the problems you may experience if something goes wrong. You'll find tips and consumer information at the mobile phone industry association's websites:

- www.amta.org.au
- www.mindyourmobile.com



"He said I couldn't return the phone as it wasn't in its original box."

> Nicole's phone was returned without being fixed. "Nokia told me there was 'physical damage' and they wouldn't fix or replace the phone. They said they weren't claiming / physically damaged the phone, but that it had physical damage [and so wasn't covered by the warranty]."

"You placed the phone in or near water"

Gordon and Maria, CHOICE readers from Queensland, bought two mobiles in April 2005 as part of a two-year contract with 3. Within a few months, Gordon's phone wouldn't turn on. He contacted 3 and the mobile was sent for repairs, but a few days later he received a call from a 3 representative saying the phone "cannot be repaired or replaced due to water found inside [it]. You have placed your mobile phone in or near water."

"As new customers, we were totally shocked at this treatment," says Maria. "Gordon kept explaining that the day the phone broke down had been particularly humid and that perhaps that caused the problem. He didn't have the phone in or near water."

When they contacted CHOICE, Gordon and Maria were stuck paying a monthly bill for a phone they couldn't use — the contract didn't expire until April 2007 and they didn't have the time or financial resources to take the matter to the small claims tribunal (they hadn't been told about the industry ombudsman). After we contacted 3, the company arranged a replacement phone and credit — a good outcome, but one that wasn't forthcoming until CHOICE got involved.

'New' phone had someone else's pictures

Within two months of purchase, Larry's Samsung started to malfunction, so he took it back to the retailer. After numerous calls to the shop, head office and the repair centre to find out what was happening, he was told he'd get a new phone as replacement.

"I picked up the so-called 'new' phone after more than a month of waiting," Larry says. "When I went through the menus I found it wasn't a new phone or even my old one, but someone else's. It had their details, pictures and personal videos."

Larry returned the phone and asked for the new one he'd been promised. When he picked up his second 'new' phone he found that, yet again, it wasn't new. "The keys were wobbly and the battery had a sticker indicating the phone had been repaired."

After we contacted Samsung about Larry's experience he was offered a choice of two replacement phones. He's considering his options.

Useless insurance

Insurance to cover faults may be worthwhile, particularly for expensive phones, but a few readers complained about the high excess (the first part of a claim that you have to pay yourself). It can mean claiming is just not worthwhile.

For example, Peter's phone broke down just outside its warranty period. "The excess was \$100," he says. "It was more economical to buy a new phone for \$120 instead. I'd been paying around \$5 per month for insurance over a couple of years, but my advice is don't bother with insurance. Now I just buy the cheapest and most basic phone available and don't lock myself into any contract. If I drop the phone, I just buy another one — it's cheaper."

Know your rights

If your phone is faulty or seems not to be what you signed up for:

- Try contacting the manufacturer's or service carrier's customer service: technical support may be all you need.
- Contact the retailer: it's their responsibility to facilitate repairs, or a replacement or refund if the phone wasn't of



"The poor customer service appalled me."

Denied legal rights

Tanya's cheap phone 'died' after three weeks. Initially, the retailer said "bad luck" because Tanya didn't have a computer-generated receipt (the shop's computer was down when she made the purchase, so she'd been given a handwritten receipt, but the shop then denied ever issuing handwritten receipts). When she pushed on this issue, the record of her purchase 'appeared'; but the shop continued to deny Tanya her rights.

"I explained that under consumer law they had a responsibility to repair or replace the malfunctioning phone," Tanya says. "Consumers would expect phones to last longer than a month — and it was still under warranty."

Eventually, the retailer did send it to the manufacturer for 'assessment'. Tanya heard nothing for four weeks. After pursuing the retailer, she had a call to say the phone was "stuffed" and had been "water-damaged", voiding her warranty.

"I'm certain the phone was never immersed in water, but the salesperson said water damage is caused by moisture and easily happens even if the phone is left near a bathroom or in a car. He said it happens to thousands of phones. I asked what recourse I had and was told I could have the phone independently assessed at my own cost." (High humidity and extreme temperatures can damage phones, but we think claiming moisture damage to a new phone can be caused by leaving it 'near' a bathroom is stretching it.)

"The poor customer service appalled me," said Tanya. "I guess with cheap phones one doesn't expect a lot, but to last less than one month is unacceptable."

merchantable quality, fit for the purpose intended or as it was described (remember to keep proof of purchase). If necessary, the retailer should contact the manufacturer or repair centre; this isn't your responsibility. However, you have the option of contacting the manufacturer or its repair centre directly to arrange repairs if you prefer. You shouldn't have to pay anything to get the phone repaired under warranty, but you may have to cover transport costs.

- If your complaint isn't dealt with satisfactorily, lodge a complaint with the TIO (see *Useful contacts*, below right). It can look into complaints about mobile phones that were sold as part of a bundled package of services (including, for example, a monthly plan or prepaid service), but not handsets that were bought separately (for these you'd contact your state's fair trading/consumer affairs department).

- The ACCC or your local fair trading/consumer affairs department can further explain your legal rights (a detailed *Warranties and Refunds* brochure is available at www.accc.gov.au).

- After the manufacturer's warranty expires, under the law you still have an implied warranty — you'd reasonably expect mobile phones to last for longer than a year. However, what's considered 'reasonable' varies and can only be determined by a court — a \$600 phone would have a longer statutory warranty than a \$70 one, for example.

- If it's no longer covered by any form of warranty, you'll have to pay for repairs yourself. Contact the manufacturer or its accredited repair centre and ask for a written quote.

- Insurance and extended warranties may cover repair costs. However, extended warranties often have the same restrictions as the original warranty and may cover even less, while an insurance excess can make claiming not worthwhile.

Better policing needed

CHOICE has real concerns about the mobile phone industry's complaints handling, repair times, customer service and warranty exclusions. Consumers aren't getting the response they're entitled to from some retailers and when they get knocked back, many don't know where to turn. We think this industry needs a clean-up, including:

- Wider jurisdiction for the TIO, making it a one-stop shop to help consumers who have mobile phone complaints. Currently the onus is on consumers to find out whether they're covered by the TIO or their state consumer affairs/fair trading department, which makes the process more complicated and encourages them just to give up.

- Introduction of a mobile phone customer service guarantee covering timelines for fixing faults and handling complaints (one already exists for landlines).

- Strong action by fair trading agencies where retailers systematically try to avoid their responsibilities to consumers — such as saying physical damage isn't covered by the warranty even when they're not claiming the consumer caused the damage. ■

Buck passing

After her phone developed a fault, Kendall was given the runaround between retailer (Optus) and manufacturer (Nokia) over a period of nearly six months. "There was a real lack of understanding of who was actually liable for my after-sales service, whether it was Optus or Nokia," she says. "They passed the buck to each other."

The Department of Fair Trading was quite clear on the matter, telling Kendall that legally the retailer must provide after-sales service.

After we contacted Optus about this poor service, Kendall was provided with a replacement phone and compensated for the inconvenience she experienced. Optus apologised and says it's reviewed its policies to ensure this sort of event doesn't happen again. Nokia said it plans to look into Kendall's case further.



GENE ROSS

"There was a real lack of understanding of who was actually liable for my after-sales service."

Three months waiting

Soon after Donna bought her Nokia in November 2005, it started doing strange things and turning itself off. "I complained to the Telstra shop where I purchased the phone and they sent it to their repairer," Donna says. "That took approximately two weeks. When I got the phone back it had lost its ringtones and screen savers. It was returned to Nokia to reset its factory settings. After plenty of calls and complaints to the repairer, my phone was returned after around three months. It works now."



GREG MILLS

"After plenty of calls and complaints to the retailer, my phone was returned after around three months."

USEFUL CONTACTS

- Australian Competition and Consumer Commission: 1300 302 502, www.accc.gov.au. You'll also find links for state and territory fair trading/consumer affairs authorities.
- Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman: 1800 062 058, www.tio.com.au.

On your wedding day you'll probably be faced with more camera lenses than Nicole Kidman going to the Oscars — how will you find the perfect dress at the perfect price?

Wedding belles

IN A NUTSHELL

- Like any other expensive purchase, buying a wedding dress can come with high-pressure sales tactics to persuade you to put your money down on the spot.
- The same rule as always applies: don't. Shop around and find the best dress at the best price.

Your wedding day: you may have dreamed about it for years and certainly will have invested plenty of time and effort into organising it once you and your partner decided to say "I do". And there's plenty to get done: guest lists, invitations, deciding on a venue and the honeymoon — they can all be exciting but also stressful, thanks to tight timelines and high costs.

However, some recent CHOICE research found many brides consider buying the wedding dress to be one of the most important decisions of all. Some thought it was equal to the wedding ceremony and more important than the reception venue and the honeymoon.

Unfortunately, according to reports from some of our readers, many women shopping for their dream dress didn't have a great experience. A few said they'd noticed the absence of price tags on dresses and found that prices given verbally had gone up on a second visit. Others said they'd been told they had to pay a premium if they needed their dress earlier than the time quoted by the shop.

We decided to investigate by sending out three 'shadow shoppers' to play anxious brides on their search for the perfect wedding dress. Our shoppers visited three

locations in Sydney that are well known centres for mid-priced (approximately \$1000–\$2500) bridal wear: the city centre, Parramatta and Wetherill Park. Between them they visited a total of 20 shops.

The shoppers were to try on a few dresses in each store and to particularly search out dresses that didn't have price tags on them. They also asked a few specific questions, and reported back on things such as what the prices were for alterations, whether there were any hidden extras and if they were offered any discounts for purchasing that day.

While our shoppers' experiences were far from all bad, it was their more negative encounters that provide some food for thought and things to watch out for.

Dresses, dresses everywhere but not a price in sight

"No dresses had price tags — over 200 dress styles in the shop and the assistant gave the price off the top of her head." CHOICE shadow shopper, Wetherill Park.

"When I asked the price of one dress, the sales assistant grabbed my arm and said, 'Let's find a dress you love first and then we'll talk about price.'" CHOICE shadow shopper, Wetherill Park.

All tied up in a package

When Katrina from NSW started her wedding dress search she thought she'd done all the right things. She'd found a style she liked in a magazine and made an appointment with the store that was listed as a stockist. So far, so good, but from there on things didn't run so smoothly.

Katrina says the sales assistant at the store had a very unpleasant manner and spoke quite rudely to her and her mother. However, she persevered and after trying several dresses, fell in love with one design, asked the price and was told it would be \$2580.

When Katrina's Mum asked how much the required alterations would cost the sales assistant refused to answer, saying, "When she puts a deposit on the dress we will then negotiate a package on the alterations." When her Mum kept pushing for even an approximate price, the sales assistant insisted she wouldn't discuss alterations until the \$1000 deposit was paid.

Although Katrina loved the dress she decided she couldn't give her business to someone who'd been so rude. "She spoke to me like a child and she was just as rude to my mother."

She went to some other bridal stores but found nothing as good as the first dress. Desperate, she even went back to the same store again a few weeks later but was told the same story. Again, she felt pressured to pay up but wasn't comfortable doing so without knowing what the final price was going to be.

Fortunately she found another retailer who was able to order the same dress and would charge a flat fee of \$200 for any alterations needed. Katrina says she's now got the dress on order and is thrilled there will be no hidden extras. "After all, as someone pointed out to me, you wouldn't buy a car without knowing the full price — why would I do it with my wedding dress?"



"She spoke to me like a child and she was just as rude to my mother."

While our shadow shoppers found that most of the stores they visited had price tags on the dresses, six of the 20 didn't. At most of these the sales assistants checked their notes and provided a verbal price — the 200-prices-in-the-head experience quoted above was a one-off, though disconcerting.

When there were price tags it was quite common that they were very difficult to see or to get at, being tucked into the display dresses, which shoppers are discouraged from touching. In one shop in Parramatta our shadow shopper had difficulty working out whether there were tags or not as the dresses she tried on were always handled by the sales assistant alone — she was never given the opportunity to check.

There were a few classic high-pressure sales tactics evident. For example, the 200-prices assistant also mentioned that she could arrange a 'package' if our shadow shopper purchased extras such as bridesmaids' dresses, a veil or other accessories.

In another store in Wetherill Park, the dresses our shadow shopper tried on didn't have price tags — she was told the dresses were new and hadn't been tagged yet. She was given the prices verbally and offered a 20%

discount if she put down the deposit that day — another classic high-pressure sales tactic.

Pushing buttons

"Sales assistants would make comments like, 'Oh, it's a limited design, we don't know how long it will be available'... and to me that felt like a way of pressuring me." Kellie, Victoria.

"A sales assistant tried to make me come back today with Mum as they will be open till 9 pm. If I pay a quarter then, the dress style is secure. She attempted to make me leave some form of deposit today to secure the dress." CHOICE shadow shopper, Parramatta.

"The sales assistant tried to hurry me into buying the dress by telling me stories of other people who had waited too long and returned to find the dress they wanted no longer available." CHOICE shadow shopper, city centre.

Shadow shoppers and readers didn't just encounter the usual 'special offers' to encourage them to put down their money on the day. Plenty of readers who wrote to us about their experiences mentioned that they felt pressured to make a decision quickly in order to secure the dress they wanted. >

> Our shadow shoppers also all experienced some kind of pressure like this from some sales assistants. In one shop in the city our shopper was told the dress styles available within her budget wouldn't be available closer to the wedding date; another suggested buying the dress soon as the price would go up after Christmas, while a third said if she found a dress she liked she should buy it rather than waiting, as the style might no longer be available.

In a shop in Parramatta our shopper was told to secure the dress as soon as possible because "you don't want to miss out".

In Wetherill Park our shopper was also urged to buy as soon as possible. One sales assistant told her she didn't need to bring back friends or family to see the dress because the decision "should be yours". She also told the shopper that if she decided that she wanted the dress later that day that she was welcome to call after hours.

Apart from the pressure to make a commitment straightaway, another sales tactic is to play on the customer's excitement and emotions. At one store in Wetherill Park our shadow shopper was told she "looked like a bride" when she walked in the door — which she found pretty funny as she was wearing old jeans, no make-up and thongs at the time. Later when she was trying on dresses she was told, "We will make you look like a goddess." When she came out of the change rooms, the Bridal March was playing softly in the background, flattering lighting had been arranged and a veil and tiara were put on her head.

Emotions aside, there can be plenty of financial pressure: the same shopper was told in another store, "It's

worth the extra dollars [more than she'd said she wanted to pay] if you really love the dress." She also noticed there were brochures advertising personal loans on display at the counter.

Are you serious?

"I felt that she wasn't very keen to show me the dresses. She was hesitant to take the dresses I liked off the mannequin. She asked if I really wanted to try on anything without the opinion of my mother or friends. I think this was a bit rude." CHOICE shadow shopper, Parramatta.

While pushy salespeople aren't too surprising in a high-profit industry like bridal wear, in some stores our shadow shoppers felt they weren't being taken seriously, as in the quote above. At Wetherill Park our shadow shopper also reported wandering around one store for over 15 minutes before finally asking a reluctant salesperson to help her try on the dresses.

Some of the readers who contacted us also said they'd found the attitude of sales assistants to be 'snotty' and sometimes found it difficult to get assistance, particularly if they hadn't made an appointment beforehand.

To be fair, some bridal retailers point out that fitting a wedding dress takes a lot of time and effort and say many shoppers visit their stores to try on dresses they have no intention of buying. During busy periods such as Saturday many stores require an appointment to manage their customers better. However, our shoppers went mid-week and the shops weren't especially busy.

We think it's reasonable for someone planning to buy something as expensive and special as a wedding dress



"Courage is a hard thing to find when you're standing in front of a stranger in your underwear."

The importance of shopping around

When Catherine from the ACT started her search for a wedding dress she had a good idea of the style she wanted but wasn't sure if she would buy a dress or have something made.

When she visited her first bridal wear store and told the assistant she was still deciding what to do, she was told that if she didn't intend to buy she couldn't try on the dresses. Catherine eventually talked them around, but was even less impressed when the assistant started telling horror stories about other bride's dresses.

Shopping around, she then visited another shop in Canberra. Despite the array of dresses in stock the store owner insisted that Catherine's hips were too big for most of the styles and that she had only one dress that would suit. Catherine tried on the suggested dress, which she describes as a "disgusting white box". The dress also had a stain and was fraying, but the owner insisted that the \$1200 she was charging was a good price.

Catherine said no and thanked her for her time but says she wished she'd had the courage to tell this woman what she really thought of her service. But: "Courage is a hard thing to find when you're standing in front of a stranger in your underwear."

Eventually she contacted a "brilliant" dressmaker, and the reactions of her family, friends and husband on the day reinforced her final choice. But most importantly, she says, "I wore the dress I wanted."

to be taken seriously and given willing help — but don't keep popping back to try it on again for your girlfriends, mother, sister and so on once you've chosen it.

It's all in the timing

"When I went shopping/looking for my wedding dress a few months before we got married, I was laughed at in some of the wedding dress shops, as they said I should have been having 'final fittings' by then," Kerry, WA.

If you want to go the traditional white wedding route, the more time you have to plan and shop for your wedding dress the better. Our shadow shoppers said they were looking for a dress for their wedding in 12 months' time. This was deemed to be 'just enough time' by a lot of stores, with many saying their lead time was approximately 8–10 months to get the dress made. One shadow shopper was told by one store that they were already putting in orders for weddings in 2008 (this was in September 2006).

While this is fine if you have the time, it's important to check what any alterations will cost, as with a lead time of 12 months you may find that your body shape has changed in that time — or in the case of one of our readers, she was pregnant.

The verdict

Although it's special, try to keep your emotions under control when you're shopping for a wedding dress — one strategy could be to take someone who's not too excited with you. Like any other expensive purchase it's likely to come with plenty of high-pressure sales



GENE ROSS

tactics to get you to part with your money on the spot. The same rule applies as always: don't. Within reasonable time constraints (and without wasting shops' time), shop around and compare plenty of dresses and prices.

With stores with pushy sales assistants, pressure to make a commitment and even brochures for personal loans, unfortunately there's not much romance left in buying a wedding dress. ■

ANOTHER WAY

If you're not keen to run the gauntlet of bridal shops you could try these alternatives.

- Use a dressmaker: try the Yellow Pages or your local paper for contacts, or ask around to see if someone can give you a recommendation.
- If you're not looking for something traditional you could go for a gorgeous cocktail or evening dress 'off the rack', which is likely to cost you less, not have timing problems and you may even get the chance to wear it again. Try designers that do evening wear or check out the designer and formal wear sections of department stores such as Myer and David Jones.

What to look out for

Wedding dress shopping is exciting, but before you run out the door consider this checklist:

- **Timing** Many dresses are made especially for the customer, often overseas. Some shops we spoke to say a lead time of approximately 12 months is best. Make sure the dress you want can be available on the day you want it.
- **Get it in writing** If you find a dress you love, have the sales assistant write down both the style number and price that was quoted to you on a business card. This way, there'll be no discrepancies about the style or the price on your return visit.
- **Deposit** To order a dress you'll be asked to put down a deposit, which can range from a couple of hundred dollars to 50% of the purchase price. Check all the details before you commit yourself: are there any hidden extras, is there a cooling-off period in which you can change your mind and get your deposit back, or any circumstance that might allow you to cancel your order?
- **Alterations** Most dresses will need some last-minute fine-tuning. Plenty of nervous brides shed a few kilos and with such long order times your body shape may change. Check carefully with the store: are alterations included or extra? If extra, ask them how much. Get quotes for different alterations such as taking the dress in, letting it out, changing the length. Find out who'll be doing the alterations — someone inhouse or will it have to go to an external person it may be hard to get a convenient appointment with? Some readers we spoke to said they'd found it hard to book for fittings or alterations at times that suited them. Check you'll have access when it suits you.



Ten foods that'll make your kids fat faster.

Fat, fatter, fattest

IN A NUTSHELL

- Plenty of everyday products from the supermarket can be just as fattening as fast food. Often they're aimed at kids, and even promoted as healthy.
- Snacks and soft drinks tend to cram a lot of energy into a small package, making it easy to get far too many kilojoules from eating what looks like a very modest serve.

OK, yet another article on childhood obesity. And maybe your kids aren't fat anyway. But you might still be surprised at just how many flab-forming kilojoules some of the foods specially aimed at kids can pack in.

And on average Aussie kids really are getting fatter (see CHOICE, October 2006). While there are many contributing causes, lack of exercise doesn't seem to be the main one. A recent study of schoolkids in NSW found that they're now exercising more than they were around 10 years ago, yet still stacking on the weight. It seems they're simply eating too much of the wrong foods.

We all know fast foods should only be an occasional treat (or a last resort for desperate parents), but the supermarket shelves are also loaded with products that'll really pack on the kilos if your kids have too many of them too often. And to make it worse, these products are often promoting a healthy image.

We've listed 10 (see pages 18–19). They're not the only offenders, and many products out there are similar, if not the same — but they'll give you some pointers to what to avoid.

Fattening fodder

What makes some foods more fattening than others? If there were a simple answer there wouldn't be so many fad diets. But you can get a good idea of how fattening a particular food is by looking at the energy (in kilojoules or Calories) per 100 g on the nutrition information panel. Nutritionists call this number the food's **energy density**. It seems we're programmed to feel full when we've eaten a certain quantity of food, regardless of its energy value. So when foods pack in a lot of energy — when they're energy-dense — it's easy to get a lot of kilojoules from what looks like a very modest serving, and then not feel particularly full afterwards.

Foods with high energy density generally have a lot of fat and sugar (such as cakes, pastries and most processed snacks); those with low energy density typically contain more water and dietary fibre (most fruits and vegetables, for example).

Obviously other factors, such as how much we enjoy the food and the portion size, also influence the amount we eat, but our bodies haven't evolved to cope with the energy-dense foods now so common on supermarket shelves.

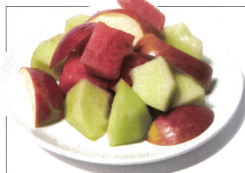
MEAL		NUTRIENTS PER SERVE				NUTRIENTS PER SERVE		
		Energy (kJ)	Total fat (g)	Sugars (g)		Energy (kJ)	Total fat (g)	Sugars (g)
Breakfast	UNHEALTHY DIET				HEALTHIER DIET			
	Nestlé Milo Cereal (30 g) with 125 mL of reduced-fat milk	770	3.5	16.3	Two wheat biscuits with two thirds of a cup (167 mL) of reduced-fat milk	789	3.3	10.0
	Two slices of high-fibre white toast with Ferrero Nutella (20 g)	1145	7.9	12.6	One slice of high-fibre white toast with polyunsaturated spread (7 g) and jam (10 g)	599	5.7	7.2
	Ribena Blackcurrant Fruit Drink (250 mL)	625	<1	35.3	Orange juice (250 mL)	370	0.3	19.4
Mid-morning snack	Kellogg's Nutri-Grain cereal bar (30 g)	514	2.3	11.0	Nestlé Ski D'Lite Apple and Pear cereal bar (24 g)	363	0.6	6.2
	Uncle Toby's Roll-Ups raspberry flavour (15.6 g)	240	0.5	4.7	Grapes (100 g)	267	0.1	14.9
Lunch	Ham sandwich made with high-fibre white bread and polyunsaturated spread (14 g)	1104	10.6	1.8	Ham sandwich made with high-fibre white bread and polyunsaturated spread (14 g)	1104	10.6	1.8
	Arnott's Tiny Teddy Dippers Strawberry with Choc Chip Tiny Teddy (27 g)	600	7.9	11.0	Fruit yoghurt (100 g)	476	3.1	16.4
	Apple (medium)	370	0.2	19.4	Apple (medium)	370	0.2	19.4
	Ribena Blackcurrant Fruit Drink (330 mL)	710	<1	41.3	Water	0	0	0
After school	Kraft Snack Abouts Cheese Spread with Chicken Flavoured Biscuits (28 g)	501	8.2	1.0	Cheddar cheese (20 g) with carrot (30 g) and celery (30 g) sticks	396	6.8	1.9
	Go Natural Berry Pieces in Yoghurt (30 g)	546	5.6	17.4	Two Arnott's Vita-Weats with polyunsaturated spread (7 g) and Vegemite (5 g)	400	5.8	0.3
	Steggles Chicken Nuggets (125 g)	1330	20.3	1.3	Barbecued chicken breast, no skin (90 g)	697	7.2	0
Dinner	McCain SuperFries (125 g)	896	8.8	<1	Mashed potato (100 g) with milk	285	0.4	1.0
	Broccoli (100 g)	138	0.3	0.4	Broccoli (100 g)	138	0.3	0.4
	Pumpkin (50 g)	94	0.2	2.4	Pumpkin (50 g)	94	0.2	2.4
	Ice cream (two scoops)	383	5.3	9.9	Banana with ice cream (one scoop)	572	2.8	22.0
	The Natural Beverage Company Apple Naturally Flavoured Soft Drink (250 mL)	499	0.0	29.0	Reduced-fat milk (250 mL)	525	3.6	13.7
TOTAL		10,465	81.6	214.8		7745	51.0	137.0

A day's food for an eight-year-old: the 'unhealthy diet' provides far too many kilojoules, meaning your child's likely to put on weight. However, there's more to food than kilojoules: milk, for example provides more kJ than the same amount of most sweetened fizzy drinks, but they lack the proteins, vitamins and minerals in milk.

Dodgy drinks

Sweetened fizzy drinks, fruit drinks and fruit cordials are especially bad news nutritionally. In the past they were a treat, something kids had at parties or other special occasions. Now many kids have them every day. But drinks don't make you feel as full as solid foods do, so you can take in a lot of sugar (and the kilojoules that go with it) and hardly notice it.

And evidence is emerging that even artificially sweetened drinks without sugar can give you more of a liking for sweet foods and so contribute indirectly to you putting on weight. >



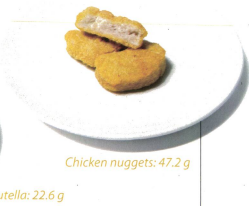
Tropical fruit salad: 234 g

Each of these plates has 500 kJ of food. Ferrero Nutella has a high energy density and the 500 kJ is provided by a small portion. The portion size is a little bigger for Steggles Chicken Nuggets, but a lot bigger for a tropical fruit salad, which has a low energy density typical of fruit and vegetables generally.

Nutrition information in the table is from the packaging or food composition tables.



Nutella: 22.6 g



Chicken nuggets: 47.2 g

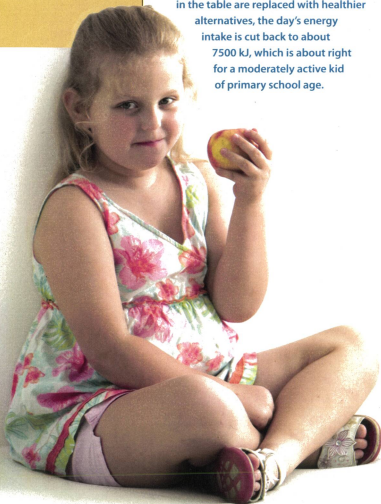
The fat list

We've listed 10 high-profile products loaded with kilojoules that are aimed at kids. There might be other, similar products on the market, but these ones in particular are being heavily promoted or they're already market leaders.

All the foods manage to cram in more than 1000 kJ per 100 g — most of them a lot more. Even the drinks manage about 200 kJ per 100 mL — that's around the same as reduced-fat milk, but without the milk's valuable protein, calcium and vitamins.

It wouldn't be too difficult for some kids to eat or drink all these products in a day, and they'd have a huge impact on the day's energy intake (see the table, page 17, for an example). The day's total would be about 10,000 kJ; that's a lot more than even the average recommended daily intake for an adult (8700 kJ), and small children obviously need less.

If the foods from our 'unhealthy diet' in the table are replaced with healthier alternatives, the day's energy intake is cut back to about 7500 kJ, which is about right for a moderately active kid of primary school age.



Nestlé Milo Cereal

- Energy density: 1658 kJ/100 g.
- Energy per serve: 497 kJ.

When we looked at breakfast cereals in March 2005 we found that kids get a raw deal. Most kids' cereals are low in fibre and either too sugary or too salty.

While OK for salt, Nestlé Milo Cereal has more kilojoules (and fat) per serve than most other kids' cereals — not such a good idea for kids already over-nourished.

The packaging boasts about "slow-burning energy" and claims it "can help you feel fuller for longer and perform at your best". This is essentially a low-GI claim, and Nestlé told us that, eaten with reduced-fat milk, Milo Cereal does have a low GI. But that just seems to be an attempt to take the curse off an otherwise unhealthy product.

In fact Nestlé Milo Cereal currently (we're told the formula's changing) has more kilojoules per serve than even Kellogg's Coco Pops — which itself certainly isn't the healthiest kids' breakfast cereal. Milo Cereal also has more fat than Coco Pops and only 16% less sugar. Sanitarium Weet-Bix is a much healthier cereal, even if you add some sugar.



Steggles Chicken Nuggets

- Energy density: 1060 kJ/100 g.
- Energy per serve: 1330 kJ.

Most kids love chicken nuggets. They're a handy standby to keep in the freezer but not something to give them on a regular basis. These are only 55% chicken, so one serve (125 g) gives you only 69 g of actual meat. But this comes with 20 g (four teaspoons) of fat — more than three times the fat they'd get from the same amount of barbecued chicken breast, which means they'll also get more than twice the kilojoules.



Uncle Tobys Roll-Ups Funprints Raspberry Flavour

- Energy density: 1560 kJ/100 g.
- Energy per serve: 240 kJ.

Uncle Tobys was recently hauled over the coals by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission for claiming Roll-Ups are "made with 65% real fruit". The label now limits itself to "made with real fruit", but even this claim seems over the top for a product whose major ingredient certainly isn't fruit (it's maize maltodextrin, a form of starch) and which is almost 30% sugars. It's 23% concentrated fruit paste.

Another ingredient that's listed is hydrogenated canola oil, so Roll-Ups also contain some artery-clogging trans fats that don't have to be declared on the label. But we fully endorse one claim you'll see on the label — Roll-Ups are definitely a "good source of energy" — that's kilojoules, don't forget.

A piece of genuinely "real fruit" (such as an apple) is a much healthier option. It'll leave your kid with a full stomach but fewer fat-forming kilojoules (and with no trans fat).



Ribena Blackcurrant Fruit Drink

- Energy density: 215 kJ/100 mL.
- Energy per serve: 710 kJ.

It's been around forever, but now comes in a funky 'Squee-zee' pack. And with its much vaunted vitamin C and 'no artificial colour, flavour or sweetener', you might think Ribena is a healthy drink to put in your kid's lunchbox — especially if you had it when you were a kid and your Mum said it was good for you. But the major ingredients in Ribena are water and sugar; blackcurrant juice comes a very poor third at only 5% (and even then it's a processed product made from concentrate).

Any product that's called a 'fruit drink' is best avoided. Under the Food Standards Code 'fruit drinks' don't have to contain any more than 5% fruit (so Ribena just meets the bare minimum standard) but unlimited sugar is allowed. 'Fruit juice', on the other hand, can't be diluted with water and manufacturers are restricted to adding no more than 4% sugar.

Kids don't really need any fruit juice or other sweet drinks to have a balanced and healthy diet. Water to drink with a piece of real fruit is a better — and more filling — option.



Kraft Dairy Bites Snack Abouts Cheese Spread and Chicken Flavoured Biscuits

- Energy density: 1789 kJ/100 g
- Energy per serve: 501 kJ

"Dairy goodness that kids love!" — but also a lot of fat (much of it saturated) and far too much salt for a kids' snack. Just where the "dairy goodness" comes from isn't obvious, and Kraft couldn't tell us how much calcium this product contains. But a serve (28 g) comes with about the same amount of saturated fat as a 50 g packet of potato chips. A piece of real cheese and some low-fat crackers would be a healthier choice.



Go Natural Berry Pieces in Yoghurt

- Energy density: 1820 kJ/100 g.
- Energy per serve: 546 kJ.

We found this product in the healthfood aisle, but it's more like confectionery. The first two ingredients are sugar and fat. What's more, the fat is hydrogenated palm oil, which must be among the unhealthiest fats the manufacturers could have chosen. Palm oil contains the fatty acids most strongly linked to heart disease risk, and hydrogenation makes it worse — this process produces trans fatty acids that are even worse for hearts (young and old) than saturated fat.

The "real fruit" claimed on the label is made from fruit concentrate and the "delicious tangy yoghurt" is only yoghurt powder, with not a live bacterium in sight, and far from "natural". Why not send your kid to school with a tub of real fruit yoghurt in their lunchbox instead?



The Natural Beverage Co Apple Naturally Flavoured Soft Drink

- Energy density: 200 kJ/100 mL.
- Energy per serve: 499 kJ.

"No artificial colours, no artificial flavours, no preservatives." You might think from the advertising hype that this is healthier for your kids than other fizzy drinks, such as Sprite. But in reality the major ingredients are the same — water and sugar. In fact it contains a little more sugar than Sprite, but only 1% apple. That's so little apple you wouldn't even see it, so the manufacturers have added malt extract to give the drink a more apple-juice-like colour. What's natural about that?



Kellogg's Nutri-Grain Bar

- Energy density: 1714 kJ/100 g.
- Energy per serve: 514 kJ.

Cereal bars aren't as healthy as you might think, for adults or kids (see CHOICE, October 2006) — they can be loaded with sugar and saturated fat. Kellogg's Nutri-Grain bars might be "iron man food" but they're among the worst cereal bars. They have too much saturated fat and sugar, and they lack the dietary fibre and other valuable nutrients your kid would get from cereals bars made from whole grains. Instead you could choose a bar with a better nutrition profile, such as Nestlé Ski D'Lite Apple and Pear.



Ferrero Nutella Hazelnut Spread

- Energy density: 2175 kJ/100 g.
- Energy per serve: 435 kJ.

Loaded with fat and sugar, Nutella combines the worst aspects of peanut butter (high fat) and jam (high sugar) in one product. But it contains nutritious hazelnuts and has a low GI, so does that make it OK?

No. Hazelnuts are well down the list of ingredients at only 13%, and a low GI doesn't necessarily mean a food is healthy; chocolate cake with chocolate frosting has much the same GI as Nutella. Mashed banana or even jam make healthier spreads for toast — and they have low GIs too.



Arnott's Tiny Teddy Dippers Strawberry with Choc Chip Tiny Teddy

- Energy density: 2240 kJ/100 g.
- Energy per serve: 600 kJ.

What kid wouldn't love Tiny Teddys with some pink goo to dunk them in? But this product takes the prize among our selection for the most energy packed into the least food (a serve is only 27 g). Nearly 80% of the energy comes from fat and sugars, so don't expect Tiny Teddy Dippers to provide many of the nutrients your kid really needs.

There are plenty of healthier snacks you could put in your kid's lunchbox, such as a tub of fruit yoghurt or a prepackaged fruit cup



Everything you need
to know to help
choose the right
GP for you.

Looking for Doctor Right

IN A NUTSHELL

- Whether or not a GP bulk-bills may be a factor in choosing one, but currently you might not have that choice. Bulk-billed services should be available to everyone, and the disincentives that face bulk-billing GPs should be removed.
- There's very little regulation of what happens to your medical records if your doctor's practice closes down — you could be left without them. Professional guidelines on the management of health records should be made law.

The relationship you have with your doctor can be one of the most crucial in your life, particularly if you have a chronic condition or develop a serious illness. Your GP will co-ordinate your care and refer you for tests and to specialists, nursing and other health services so you get complete healthcare. GPs can also help you stay in good health and prevent unnecessary visits to a hospital. A positive ongoing relationship with your GP is extremely valuable, making it all the more important to choose the right one.

Finding a GP

If the relationship with your current GP isn't working you might be thinking of looking around for a new one. Or you might need a new doctor because you've moved house, or your usual doctor is retiring, for example. To find a new GP you can:

- Ask your current doctor for advice, if your relationship's good.
- Ask for recommendations from family, friends and neighbours.
- Ask the local pharmacist or other medical professionals who have dealings with doctors in the area.
- Ring your local Division of General Practice (ADGP)

and ask for a list of the doctors practising in your area. Some divisions can even provide additional information about the doctors — interests and expertise or languages spoken, for example. Professional associations such as the Australian Medical Association (AMA) and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) may also be able to help. See *For more information*, page 22, for where to find contact details.

About the practice

Once you've narrowed down your list of possible doctors, visit their practices and consider the following:

- **Location** Is the practice reasonably easy for you to get to? You might find it more convenient to see a GP closer to your work rather than home.
- **Opening hours** Extended hours are an advantage if you have a chronic condition that tends to flare up at odd times. Medical centres tend to be open longer hours than traditional surgeries, but you won't necessarily get to see the same doctor every time unless you book in advance. If you need a prescription or some other medical attention outside your regular doctor's surgery hours you might find it convenient to drop into a 24-hour medical centre and see a different GP. If you do this, tell your regular doctor about the visit and any medication that

was prescribed. Continuity of care is important for good health, particularly if you have a chronic condition, and incomplete medical records can be a problem.

- **Home visits** Does the practice offer this service? (It's interesting that a recent study found that, compared with young GPs (under 35), older GPs provided more home visits and attendances at residential aged-care facilities.)
- **Language spoken** If English isn't your first language, non-English language skills from GPs and other staff might be important.
- **GP gender** If you're a woman you may want at least one female doctor in the practice. Interestingly, a study in 2005 found that older GPs (65+) and female GPs generally provided longer consultations, so if you tend sometimes to feel rushed, bear it in mind.
- **Premises** Do the rooms look clean and inviting? If you'll be going there with small children, are there toys and/or an area where they can play?
- **Information** Printed health materials on offer in the waiting room are a plus — they show the practice is aware of the importance of public health education. A Practice Information Sheet provides information on fees, appointments, home visits, repeat prescriptions and so on.
- **Specialities** Do any of the doctors have extra qualifications or areas of expertise that might be of benefit to you? A diploma in obstetrics or paediatrics can be useful if you're a woman in her reproductive years or you have young kids, for example.

- **Accreditation** There are agencies (Australian General Practice Accreditation — AGPAL — and General Practice Australia — GPA, for example) that independently rate the quality of general practices and award accreditation to practices that meet a benchmark quality standard. Ask the practice if it's accredited or look for an accreditation certificate or logo on display.

- **Billing** Ask how you'll be billed when you make an appointment. You may be able to get a discount if you pay upfront; it may cost more to have an appointment on a Sunday; or the practice may bulk-bill.

Once you've chosen, take the plunge and go in for a consultation. There's no obligation to go back to that doctor if you're not satisfied. Your final choice should be a GP with whom you feel most comfortable — one whose knowledge and judgment you trust, and with whom you can talk freely and openly.

The bulk-billing story

A major consideration for some people is whether or not a medical practice bulk-bills. As a patient, bulk-billing is great — you pay nothing upfront, and you don't have to go to the trouble of claiming fees back from Medicare. The problem is that it's not always available.

Figures from Medicare indicate that around 75% of all GP services are bulk-billed. But while practices often bulk-bill concession cardholders, many charge other patients

One for the record

One day when her son was ill Karen rang her GP to make an appointment. Her family had been seeing the same Sydney GP for eight years (and had been going to the same practice for even longer), so Karen was surprised to discover that the practice had closed down without her knowledge. Her call instead went through to a recorded message informing her that to obtain copies of her family's medical records, she had to send money (\$10 per patient) to a post office box in Lithgow.

At the time Karen couldn't justify the costs involved in retrieving the records for her whole family. But just a few months later, when she had the means, it was too late — she hadn't made a record of the PO box number and the phone number had been disconnected.

With no way to accurately recall information like medication histories, the onset of a chronic ankle problem or the dates of her children's inoculations and illnesses for the first 10 years of their lives, this gap in Karen's family medical records has been a cause of frustration and inconvenience ever since.



The gap in Karen's family medical records has been a cause of frustration and inconvenience.

privately. A recent survey of GPs found that just 28.7% bulk-billed Medicare for all patients and 20% bulk-billed for pensioner/Commonwealth concession cardholders only. The reason for this, according to the AMA, is that GPs can no longer afford to bulk-bill all their patients. When Medicare first began many GPs bulk-billed because rebates were close to the cost of providing the service, but the AMA says this is no longer the case. The estimated cost of providing a standard (Level B) consultation is \$55 but the rebate is just \$31.45.

It's also been argued that charging fees allows GPs to spend more time with each patient. The length of the consultation with your doctor is important, with longer consultations associated with higher patient satisfaction and increased likelihood of preventive care, among other benefits. And there's a concern that where practices do mainly bulk-bill, GPs may find themselves under pressure to see more patients more quickly to remain viable. However, in reality there's no published evidence suggesting you'll receive a shorter consultation if you're bulk-billed than if you're privately billed.

That said, financial incentives under the current Medicare Benefit Schedule (MBS) structure certainly don't favour long consultations. For example, the rebate for a Level B consultation item, which can be up to 20 minutes long, is the same whether the consultation finishes after six minutes or 20 minutes, with the greatest per-minute financial return obviously being for six-minute consultations. Given that the average consultation >

> length is 15 minutes, there's little financial incentive for GPs to bulk-bill and it's not surprising that some prefer to bill privately.

A report to the Federal Government in 2003 proposed a change to this MBS structure, but there's been no action on this to date. Apart from some additional incentives to bulk-bill specific groups, including Commonwealth concession cardholders and children under 16, the situation remains the same.

CHOICE thinks everyone should have access to bulk-billing services, and wants disincentives that face bulk-billing GPs to be removed.

Medical records

Whichever practice you end up going to, ideally your medical records should go with you. If you change GPs you can either authorise your old practice to provide a copy or summary of your health information to your new GP, or ask your new GP to write and request the information themselves.

But if the practice you usually go to closes down, or if your GP leaves the practice or dies, things aren't so simple. In general there's very little regulation about what happens to your medical records in these situations, and it varies in each state and territory. In Victoria, for example, the law stipulates that patients must be provided with written notice about what's going to happen to their records, where practical, and a notice must also be placed in a local newspaper. Similar laws exist in the ACT. But in other states you may not be given that consideration.

In the case of medical records that aren't transferred or claimed, arrangements might have been made for them

Making a complaint

If you have a complaint about some aspect of your healthcare (the clinical treatment you've received or your doctor's conduct, for example), it's a good idea to first discuss your concerns with your doctor or another doctor in the practice. But if this doesn't resolve your problem, you have several options. You can complain to:

- The independent health services commission/ombudsman in your state or territory.
- The relevant Medical Board in your state or territory.
- Your local branch of the AMA or other professional association of which your doctor is a member, where applicable.

For contact details for these bodies in each state and territory go to www.complaintline.com.au/doctor.html.

to be stored securely under a third party's supervision. And in several states there are laws that specify how long records must be kept before they can be destroyed. So if you don't get a chance to claim your records before the practice closes, you might be able to track them down after the event. But if you're not informed of their whereabouts or you happen to miss the notice in the paper, there's not a lot you can do (see *One for the record*, page 21, for an example).

Not only is this an issue of privacy — who knows who might have access to the records while they're in limbo — but at best it's an inconvenience and at worst a health risk for patients to be deprived of access to their medical histories. There are professional guidelines for the management of health information, including the retention of medical records in GP practices, but CHOICE thinks they should be made law. ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To find contact details for your local Division of General Practice, or the AMA or RACGP in your state or territory, go to:

- www.adgp.com.au/site/index.cfm?display=301
- www.ama.com.au/web.nsf/topic/about-links
- www.racgp.org.au/contact/

You can also search for GPs in your area at www.mydr.com.au/hcp/hcp.asp?mode=GP

eHealth

The Federal Government's vision is a national, cradle-to-grave, electronic health record for all Australians. Your eHealth record would hold your complete medical history from diagnosis details and treatments to all contacts you've had with the health system.

In theory this appears to be a sensible move. Having eHealth records could help prevent unnecessary or inappropriate treatment, and could provide protection against potential adverse drug interactions and allergies. And there are clear benefits for some consumers in not having to repeat complex medical histories if visiting a range of health professionals.

But in practice there are unresolved issues, primarily relating to privacy — it's uncertain as to where and how consumers' information will be stored, and who will have access to the records, for example. And with the nightmare current plan that each state and territory will implement and manage its own eHealth initiative, things are complicated even further.

CHOICE wants all consumer concerns to be addressed before this eHealth vision becomes a reality.

Feel the burn

test

CROSTRAINERS

It's not a pair of sports shoes or a cranky gym instructor — a crosstrainer is an exercise machine that can be used at home.

For those who have the discipline to exercise at home, home gym equipment such as a crosstrainer offers lots of pluses over alternatives like a gym or fitness club. There are no costly membership fees, no queuing for machines or rushing to get there during opening hours. An exercise machine at home offers instant access and convenience; you can work out first thing in the morning, midday or even midnight.

The crosstrainer (also called an elliptical trainer) is relatively new on the scene and has been growing in popularity. The smooth-flowing movement has been likened to a mix of cross-country skiing and slow running. The advantage is that it's fairly comfortable and uses both your upper and lower body, unlike exercise bikes and rowing machines where you're sitting down.

While treadmills are also very popular, many people just don't like to run: they find it jarring or difficult. A crosstrainer is the closest action you can get to running, without the jarring.

In a heartbeat

All the machines on test have a pulse sensor, which allows the user to monitor their heart rate while exercising. This is handy for knowing when you're in the fat-burning zone* and also lets you know if you're overdoing it.

Although the sensors were pretty accurate when measuring a resting pulse they generally overestimated the heart rate during a low-level workout and



HOW WE TESTED

- The crosstrainers were assessed in three ways: by users, by an expert, and by one of our lab testers for ease of assembly.
- Our user panel was made up of five male and five female trialists of varying ages, body types and levels of fitness. They assessed ease of use, stability and comfort.
- Our expert, Dr Aron Murphy, put the crosstrainers through their paces, checking for things such as ergonomics, ease of use, stability, comfort and range of usability with different levels of fitness.

underestimated it during a medium-level one. This could be dangerous if you chose to exercise at the upper limit of the recommended heart rate range.

If you really want to accurately measure your heart rate when you push your limits during a workout, you'd be better off buying a separate, good-quality heart rate monitor with a chest strap.

Work it out

A crosstrainer is a large and expensive piece of equipment, so make sure you find a model that suits your needs. It's essential to try out several models in shops to see which work for your body and exercise style, and even whether they'll fit into the room you have for them. Most sports shops will only have a few brands on display so it's worth visiting several to make sure you get to try out a wide variety of styles. >

IN A NUTSHELL

- Our trial shows that the choice of a suitable crosstrainer depends a lot on which model best suits your body — be sure to try out a variety before you buy.
- It's an expensive piece of equipment: make sure you buy one with a decent warranty and good service options.



WHAT TO BUY

While the HEALTHSTREAM was our trialists' favourite by quite a long way, try it before you buy to make sure it suits you. Its high ratings in our user trial and assessments make it a good place to start, but it won't be ideal for everyone.

HEALTHSTREAM HS 9200E

Price: \$995

Good points

- The trialists liked it best.
- The expert rated it second best.
- Very easy to assemble.
- Our trialists and expert thought it had a great range of resistance, a good clear display and a solid, strong feel.

Bad points

- There was some noise from the flywheel when it was being used.



PHOTO: GENE ROSS

Check the stride length when you test the machine. More expensive crosstrainers tend to have a longer stride, which may give you a more effective workout.

- > If you're planning to share the crosstrainer with other people it's important that all of you try it out, as different models tend to suit different body shapes.
- Even if you think you'll get a better deal buying your crosstrainer over the internet, visit a few shops first to find the specific model that suits you.

When you're in the shop

- Go through all the resistance levels on the machine and make sure they cover a wide range; the higher levels should be very difficult or at least make you struggle. As your fitness increases it's important the crosstrainer can grow with you.
- Make sure it has a number of different programs so you can add some variety and interest to your exercise regimen.
- Check the controls are easy to use.
- Make sure it's comfortable to use, that your body stays well clear of any parts such as the bottle holder, that the moving arms don't bump into you and that you can easily read and adjust the display.
- Look for a smooth motion and a smooth change between resistance levels.
- If you're on the heavy side, check the recommended user weight — some have a limit of only 90–100 kg. ■



Dr Aron Murphy is Associate Professor in Exercise and Sport Science at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). He has also worked with elite athletes across a number of sports as well as consulted for the Sydney Swans and NSW Waratahs.

Beat the boredom

Although home gym equipment sounds great in theory, a quick flick through the classified ads is a testimony to good intentions gone awry. You can find plenty of almost new machines that have quickly become expensive dust collectors, thanks to boredom.

Dr Aron Murphy has some tips for home exercisers who want to beat the boredom and see some real results:

- Choose a machine with lots of different programs to add variety and different levels of intensity to your workout.
- Don't be overambitious: trying to work out for an hour every day is a surefire way to overtrain and get bored fast. Try short intervals every second day or so and build things up slowly.
- Mix it up: include other elements in your exercise regimen, such as walking or cycling outdoors.
- If you want to see results, you'll need to have a good diet plan too. As Dr Murphy says, "You can't outrun bad eating habits."

MODEL	PERFORMANCE			
	Overall score (%)	User trial score (%)	Expert score (%)	Assembly score (%)
Brand / model (In rank order)				
Healthstream HS 9200E	79	76	80	90
York X720	65	44	100	90
Infiniti ST-950	58	52	60	90
Nature XE550	55	56	60	30
Proteus EEC-5550	54	60	40	60
Bodyfit BF-7200C	51	50	40	90
Proform 900 CardioCross	50	54	40	60
Vmax ET6780D	43	36	40	90

what to look for

- A sturdy machine with well-fitting parts. If it's heavy, it's probably an indication of more metal than plastic parts. A wider footprint means it's more likely to be stable when you exercise at a higher intensity (which means there's more sideways movement of your body.)
- A pulse sensor on the moving handles, or even better pulse sensors on both the moving and fixed handles, though a good-quality chest-strap monitor was more reliable than any of the pulse sensors tested.
- Check the stride length when you test the machine. More expensive crosstrainers tend to have a longer stride, which may give you a more effective workout.
- Check the warranty and service agreement. Crosstrainers are large and although they're usually not that difficult to put together you wouldn't want to have to take one apart and transport it for a service. Check whether the supplier or manufacturer provides an at-home service.
- Some of the models tested had a very short warranty period of 90 days (the PROFORM and VMAX); try to get a model that has at least a year.

Maps with gaps

Judging by the flood of new models from ever more brands, car GPS is a booming market. We looked at six new models that all use more up-to-date mapping data than those in our last test (CHOICE, July 2006).

Despite this, while they all managed to plot our test routes in and around Sydney (including the new M7 tollway), none of them was convincing at finding a number of randomly selected interstate destinations — in particular those outside major centres.

What do they do?

A car navigation system consists of:

- A Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver that picks up satellite signals that allow it to determine your exact position (see *What's GPS*, below right, for details).
- A map database: all tested models have maps for most of Australia on internal flash memory or SD flash memory card. This includes many 'points of interest', such as schools, police stations, car parks, petrol stations, hospitals.
- A processor to calculate routes, distances and times.
- A screen displaying maps and route instructions.

- A loudspeaker for verbal instructions.

You enter where you want to go into the system. Using the map data, it then plots a route, calculates the travel distance and estimated time of arrival, and displays the route on a map. You can usually choose between the fastest or the shortest (geographically) route, or specifically exclude toll roads or highways.

Using satellite signals, it keeps track of your position and guides you along the plotted route with travel instructions on the display and verbally via a prerecorded or computer-generated voice.

The portable units in our test have a mount with a suction cap that can be attached to the windscreen. They plug into the cigarette lighter for power, but also have a battery that provides a few hours of operation.

They're installed within moments, and can therefore easily be moved from car to car. The tested models cost between \$499 and \$999, which is much cheaper than the fully integrated systems that come as standard or optional equipment on some (usually more upmarket) cars.

IN A NUTSHELL

- Before you buy a car GPS system, think about how often you usually have to use a street directory or map when driving, and whether it's worth spending hundreds of dollars for those occasions.
- GPS doesn't work very well in city centres with high-rise buildings, and the mapping data still has big gaps outside major centres.



WHAT TO BUY



MIO CS10

Price: \$799

Good points

- Equal best in-car performance.
- Very easy to use (in particular, very easy to operate, excellent display in daylight and at night).
- Very good quality of spoken instructions.
- Equal best for interstate destinations.
- Has a safety mode (but it's 'off' by default), and large onscreen buttons that could be operated while driving if necessary.
- Gives advance warning of red-light cameras and indicates most school zones (however, it does so at all times, not just when the zones are in operation).
- Bluetooth (can connect to some Bluetooth mobiles).

Bad points

- Doesn't come with a printed manual.



TOMTOM GO 710

Price: \$969

This model will be discontinued in early 2007.

Good points

- Equal best in-car performance.
- Best performance in tunnels (continues to update the location for about 1 km into a tunnel).
- Very easy to use (in particular, very easy to operate, excellent display in daylight and at night).
- Best quality of spoken instructions.
- Has a safety mode (but it's 'off' by default), and large onscreen buttons that could be operated while driving if necessary.
- Two-year warranty.
- Gives advance warning of red-light cameras.
- Bluetooth.

Bad points

- The heaviest and bulkiest in the test.
- Doesn't come with a printed manual.



FEATURES		SPECIFICATIONS				
User profiles	Programs	Max user weight (kg)	Power source	Min. storage dimensions (W x H x L cm)	Contact	Price (\$)*
9	12	125	Mains	62 x 162 x 150	fitnessgeneration.com.au	995
4	12	136	Mains	69 x 158 x 130	yorkfitness.com/australia	899
9	12	100	Batteries (4 x C)	63 x 153 x 149	infiniti.com.au	800
4	14	ns	Mains	74 x 159 x 147	exerciseaustralia.com	799
1	6	125	Mains	75 x 164 x 137	pbfmfitness.com.au	719
0	6	90-100	Mains	60 x 152 x 109	elitefitness.com.au	800
0	6	ns	Batteries (4 x D)	70 x 154 x 134	leisureworld.com.au	799
9	12	136	Mains	59 x 165 x 140	gpi.com.au	899

ns Not stated.

* Prices are recommended retail or what we paid in August 2006.

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- User trial score: 60%
- Expert score: 30%
- Ease of assembly score: 10%

See *How we tested*, page 23.

User profiles This is the number of individual users who can record personal details such as age, weight and height into the cross-trainer computer to set individual targets.



about the rest

- Although the YORK was rated highest by our expert and it's easy to assemble, the 10 trialists rated it second lowest. Several complained about the handles, and that they hit their knees on the drink bottle. The expert liked its smooth movements and changes in resistance, and its "solid" feel. You might want to try it to see if it suits you.
- The INFINITI is easy to assemble and the expert liked its build quality but thought its range of resistance limited and unsuitable for the very fit. Some trialists found the moving handles hit their arms, and didn't like the display.
- The NATURE is the most difficult to assemble and developed squeaks (from a console joint) and rattles (from its loose computer housing) when in use.
- Although the PROTEUS has handy pulse sensors on the moving handles, it has a low range of resistance, which makes it unsuitable for fit users. The expert also found the pedals can be accidentally adjusted at an angle that could damage your knees.
- The BODYFIT pedals aren't adjustable but it's relatively light and easy to move. It would probably suit a smaller person.
- The PROFORM clock miles not kilometres, which some trialists found irritating; others found the display difficult to use. It's also comparatively small and might be better for a smaller person.
- The VMAX is easy to assemble and has a very good computer display, but was found to be "noisy", "flimsy" and "unstable" by our expert and some trialists.

A good workout for a reasonable price

BODY SCULPTURE BE-7200G

Price: \$599

We bought this cross-trainer on special for \$449 at Kmart late in 2006. It usually retails for \$599. Unfortunately this machine wasn't released in time for our full cross-trainer trial, but a user panel gave it a quick assessment.

Good points

- It's easy to assemble, with well fitting panels.
- Provides good posture for users.
- Suitable for a wide range of body sizes.
- The backlit display is very clear, uncluttered and well presented.
- It's easy to select an exercise program and adjust the resistance levels, and it has easy-to-handle controls.

Bad points

- Although the range of resistance is quite wide, our trialists thought it might not be sufficient for extremely fit users.
- The pulse sensors are on the fixed handles and didn't feel natural to our users.
- The warranty is only six months.

Overall

This machine rated well with our panel, who thought it was well built, easy to use and has a good display panel. They also thought that even for \$599, it's good value for money.





However, integrated systems are usually connected to the car's electronics, and can overcome some of the limitations of portable units. For example, they can use speed information to keep calculating your position when there's no satellite signal, such as in a tunnel.

How well they worked

All the tested models work with the same satellite signals and use Australian mapping data from the same provider (except the ALTINA). However, the software each brand uses to let you turn all this into information that guides you from A to B varies, and we found significant quality differences.

- **In-car performance:** We tested them in the Sydney CBD, through suburbs across the city, and on a NSW country route. All the tested units calculated the distances correctly. The VOXSON's estimated times of arrival were the most accurate, the NAVMAN's the least.
- **Ease of use:** The GARMIN, MIO and TOMTOM are a lot easier to use overall than the other models.
- **Road safety:** Traffic rules obviously have to override

any instruction the friendly voice may give you, so if it asks you to turn the wrong way into a one-way street, don't do it.

Fiddling with your navigation system while driving also poses obvious dangers. While the GARMIN, MIO and TOMTOM have a safety mode that prevents the driver from using it while the car's in motion, it's off by default — but at least all three have large controls that can be operated fairly easily if you need to do so while driving. The other three models don't have a safety mode at all, and some of their controls are very small and not easy to use. However, the NAVMAN scored points for asking users to acknowledge safety advice when starting up.

- **Interstate destinations:** None of the units was very convincing at finding a number of randomly selected interstate addresses and points of interest (see *General limitations*, page 28). The MIO and TOMTOM tracked down the most (about half of the ones we looked for), the ALTINA the least (about a quarter). >

What's GPS?

GPS stands for Global Positioning System. It was developed by the US military, but is available free of charge to the general public. It has many commercial uses, from land, sea and air navigation to land surveying and map-making.

GPS consists of 24 satellites that orbit Earth exactly twice a day at an altitude of about 20,200 km. The orbits are aligned so that at least four satellites are 'visible' at any time from most places on Earth.

The satellites carry highly accurate atomic clocks and constantly send coded time signals to Earth. A GPS receiver can read these signals and use the time delay between the send and receive times to calculate its distance from the satellite (assuming the signal travels at the speed of light).

A receiver uses a method called three-dimensional trilateration to then calculate its position on Earth:

- It calculates the distances to four of the satellites.
- The spheres around each satellite that have the calculated distance as their radius overlap in exactly one point — the receiver's location.

Theoretically, three satellite signals are enough for a pretty good guess: while three spheres overlap at two points, only one of them is likely to be on Earth.

How accurate?

Normal GPS can be up to about 20 m out: the satellites' signal may be slowed down by the atmosphere, the signals may bounce off high-rise buildings or other structures, or the receiver itself may have its limitations (quality of the antenna, etc).

More expensive GPS receivers can correct at least for atmospheric inaccuracies by picking up Differential GPS (DGPS) — a network of stationary GPS receivers with known locations that constantly compare their position with the position calculated from satellite signals. They can then calculate a correction factor, which is sent to DGPS-capable receivers in the area. DGPS increases accuracy to a few metres.

More info

If you want to read more about GPS:

- Go to www.wikipedia.org and search for 'GPS'.
- The Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment has produced the 20-page guide, *GPS — a guide for users*. You can download the booklet free from www.land.vic.gov.au (then type 'GPS' in the search box).

> General limitations

- No satellite signal, no guidance. Car navigation doesn't work when you're in an underground car park or tunnel. And even high-rise buildings in a city centre can block the view of the sky to an extent that leaves navigation systems lost or at least handicapped.
- The systems can only be as good as the mapping data allows. Only one of the models recognised CHOICE's street address. And when we let the units search for destinations or plot routes in other states, our randomly selected addresses and points of interest showed further weaknesses in the mapping data and points of interest (especially in rural areas).

For example, none of the systems recognised the following locations:

- Ballarat Grammar School, Victoria.
- Queensland Museum of Lands Surveying and Mapping, Queensland.
- Perth Town Hall, WA (except the ALTINA).
- St Barnabas Church, Scottsdale, Tasmania.
- Pine Creek Mango Winery, NT.

The MIO, NAVMAN and TOMTOM correctly plotted an appropriate route from Adelaide to Kangaroo Island, 186 km using the ferry. We couldn't test the GARMIN on this route, as it only lets you use your current location as the starting point. And the ALTINA couldn't plot this route at all.

The VOXSON was a lesson in not blindly trusting your navigation system. It calculated the Adelaide-to-Kangaroo Island route at 352 km, and didn't mention you have to use a ferry.

- You can't rely on the voice instructions alone — there were a few occasions when the ALTINA gave wrong voice instructions but showed the correct instructions on the display.



HOW WE TESTED

- With each model, our tester spent a whole day driving in and around Sydney — covering the city centre, tunnels, tollways and country roads — to assess how well it worked in the car. He assessed the quality of the map data, the accuracy of the calculated routes and times, and the quality and accuracy of the GPS system.
- To check ease of use, our tester assessed the instruction manual, ease of installation and operation, intelligibility of verbal instructions, the clarity of the display and the quality of the displayed data. He also checked for instructions and warnings regarding the use of the GPS systems, and whether and how the units can be operated by the driver while driving.
- Our tester didn't drive the GPS units interstate, but checked whether they recognise a number of randomly chosen interstate addresses and points of interest.
- And to see whether extreme heat can damage the units, we exposed them to 60°C for three hours — conditions that can be reached on your car's dashboard if you park in the sun on a hot summer day.

- There may be traffic situations that are simply too tricky for a navigation system to handle — for example, if some quick lane-change manoeuvres are required.

So car GPS can be useful and is certainly a novelty at the moment, but it definitely has limitations (and frustrations). Before you rush out and buy one, think carefully about whether it'll really be worth it: how often do you usually have to use a street directory or map, and where are you likely to use it? ■

MODEL	PERFORMANCE						FEATURES						SPECIFICATIONS	
Brand/model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	In-car performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Road safety score (%)	Interstate destinations score (%)	No problems after heat test	Walking option	Bluetooth	MP3 player	Routing options: no tolls/ no unsealed roads/ no highways	Upload points of interest	Fuzzy look-up	Claimed battery life (hours)	Dimensions (H x W x D, mm)
Mio C510	83	87	87	65	49	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓		4	80 x 107 x 20
Tomtom Go 710 (A)	82	87	86	60	49	✓	✓	✓		✓ / - / ✓	✓		4	75 x 109 x 65
Garmin Nüvi 310	78	77	84	85	34	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓		4-8	73 x 98 x 22
Navman iCN 530 (A)	69	76	65	68	45	✓				✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	4	79 x 119 x 21
Voxson Voxtrack GPS300	64	76	61	38	40		✓			✓ / - / -	✓		3	73 x 115 x 43
Altina A600	56	68	51	40	26				✓	- / - / -			ns	82 x 117 x 23



what to look for

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- In-car performance: 45%
- Ease of use: 40%
- Road safety: 10%
- Interstate destinations: 5%

No problems after heat test

Models without a tick in this column didn't restart after the heat test, and their batteries couldn't be charged any more. They had to be reset and started up while connected to a power supply. While they were fully functional again after this process, it's still an annoying glitch.

Features See *What to look for*, right, for an explanation of these.

Price Recommended retail in November 2006.

ns Not stated.

(A) Discontinued late 2006/early 2007 but may still be available in some shops.

Weight (g)	Contact	Price (\$)
169	www.mio-tech.com.au	799
310	www.tomt.com	969
150	www.garmin.com.au	999
185	www.navman.com.au	699
231	www.voxson.com.au	499
217	www.natcomp.com.au	549

- **Data entry** Check how easy it is to enter addresses and routing preferences. Ideally, check a few destinations in the areas you're most likely to use the unit, to see how well the mapping data covers it.
- **Display** This should be large and glare-free, and show the information you want to see — such as a two- or three-dimensional map view, distance to the next turn, current street name, time of arrival, and distance to destination.
- **Voice instructions** Make sure these are clear and loud enough to understand over car noise.
- **Installation and portability** Check how easy the system is to install, but also how easy it is to remove and carry — you're likely to take it with you when you park the car somewhere, as it could be an attractive target for thieves if you leave it prominently displayed above the dashboard.

Features they (almost) all have

- Li-ion rechargeable battery.
- Colour LCD display in landscape format.
- Touchscreen.
- USB PC connection.
- SD memory card slot.
- Sensis/Whereis Australian map data (to street number level) and points of interest, except the ALTINA, which uses Destinator map data.
- Map data provided on SD card (ALTINA and VOXSON) or preloaded onto internal memory (all the others). You can get updated data from the manufacturers' websites and/or retailers as it becomes available (currently once a year): ALTINA \$50–\$200; GARMIN \$165; MIO \$0–\$159; NAVMAN \$179; TOMTOM approx. \$330; VOXSON \$200.
- You can also buy map data for other countries: ALTINA: USA (\$380); GARMIN: North America, Europe, NZ, South Africa, Brazil, Middle East; \$349–\$599; MIO: none; NAVMAN: NZ (\$329), USA and Canada (\$349), Western Europe and UK (\$349); TOMTOM: Wide range of city, country and regional maps; prices vary; VOXSON: Western Europe, USA, other countries on request; prices vary.
- Languages: You can select a number of other languages for the display and voice instructions (such as French, Spanish,

German, Italian, Swedish, Danish and Dutch) — except with the VOXSON (which has only English onscreen and voice instructions) and the ALTINA (which has a range of onscreen languages, but only English voice instructions).

- Allow you to store your home address.
- Allow you to select a location on the displayed map.
- Option to calculate the fastest or shortest route.
- Full route display: You can view the entire route before zooming to a more detailed view.
- Option of two- or three-dimensional map display.
- Display car speed, distance to destination, and estimated time of arrival.
- Display street name and distance to the next turn.
- Volume control for voice instructions.
- Points of interest: ATMs (except the ALTINA), schools, police stations, car parks, fast-food outlets (except the ALTINA), post offices, petrol stations, airports, railway stations (except the ALTINA), doctors (except the GARMIN), hospitals and fixed speed cameras (and all but the ALTINA can warn you when you approach a fixed speed camera).
- Option to search for a point of interest.

Features in the table

- **Walking option** You can make the system plot a route for pedestrians — for example, ignoring one-way streets, or using walkways through parks. None is suitable for guiding you on bushwalks.
- **Bluetooth** The unit can connect with some Bluetooth-enabled mobile phones — check the list of compatible phones before you buy if this is important for you.
- **MP3 player** It can play back MP3 music files.
- **Routing options** You can program it to exclude toll roads, unsealed roads or highways from the calculated route.
- **Upload points of interest** You can upload additional points of interest (for example, from manufacturers' websites) and/or enter your own.
- **Fuzzy look-up** If the system can't find the street name in the suburb you've entered, it'll search for it in neighbouring suburbs.

Pump up the volume

Magnascopic! Full dimension! Wonder volume! Turbo boost! The descriptors fly thick and fast for mascaras supposedly able to 'volumise' (thicken) your lashes to degrees never seen before.

To find out which of the mascaras marketed as 'volumising' were the pick of the bunch, 61 CHOICE Home Testers tried out 13 black, non-waterproof mascaras in this category. While they thought eight out of the 13 mascaras trialled were 'fairly effective' at volumising or thickening the lashes, the clear winner was CLARINS Wonder Volume Mascara. It rated 80% overall, as well as for the result on trialists' eyelashes and ease of application. Along with the AUSTRALIS mascara, it was the easiest to apply, and most of the trialists liked the look of their lashes after using the CLARINS.

Thirteen out of 14 people said they'd be likely to buy it if it were reasonably priced. At \$40 a tube, though, it may be out of reach of many people's budget. On a comparative level, it's \$5.71/mL — the fourth most expensive of the mascaras trialled.

And the runners-up ...

Four mascaras came equal second according to our Home Testers. ELIZABETH ARDEN Double Density Maximum Volume, ESTÉE LAUDER Magnascopic Maximum Volume, LANCÔME Amplicils Full Dimension Volume and SHISEIDO

Advanced Volume were all rated 70% overall, for ease of application and for results. If you're looking for something a bit cheaper than the CLARINS, you'll probably be disappointed to see that the recommended retail prices of these second-place mascaras is between \$40 and \$48.50 — apparently little or no difference. However, if you work it out per mL the ELIZABETH ARDEN is cheapest at \$3.90/mL, while the SHISEIDO is the most expensive at \$8/mL.

The next six mascaras were rated 60% overall, with varying scores for ease of application and how the product looked once applied. One of these, AUSTRALIS Lash Magnitude Volumising, is the cheapest in the test at 87 cents/mL (\$9.95 recommended retail price). Although it rated equal best with CLARINS for ease of application, some trialists thought it was too thin to adequately thicken their lashes.

Bottom of the barrel

The two mascaras least favoured by our Home Testers included one of the most expensive and one of the cheapest per tube respectively. YVES SAINT LAURENT Luxurious Mascara for a False Lash Effect rated just 50% overall but cost \$50 a tube (\$6.67/mL) — a lot of money for a product that, according to our results, failed to impress. And four trialists said it was mildly irritating.

The lowest scorer was the RIMMEL Xtreme Volume

IN A NUTSHELL

- At \$40 a tube the clear winner, with an overall rating of 80%, doesn't come cheap.
- And in more bad news for the budget, the highest a few much cheaper mascaras managed to score was 60%.



WHAT TO BUY



CLARINS WONDER VOLUME

Price: \$40 (\$5.71/mL)

Out on its own as the top-rated mascara, but pricy.

Trialist comments

"Smooth to put on, no scent. Thickened and lengthened my lashes great."

"Nice curl, mascara applied without any clumps."

"I'm not sure if any of the products actually lengthened and thickened my lashes but this kept them nice and separated."



ELIZABETH ARDEN DOUBLE DENSITY MAXIMUM VOLUME

Price: \$40 (\$3.90/mL)

One of a group of four mascaras rated second, and considerably cheaper in terms of how much you get in the tube for your \$40 than the CLARINS.

Trialist comments

"Went on smoothly — did not clump."

"Suitable for daytime but not a glamorous effect for evening."

"Really good at separating and lengthening lashes. It performed well, but smelt strongly of paint, which was offputting."



HOW WE TESTED

- Sixty one CHOICE Home Testers tried out 13 black, non-waterproof 'volumising' mascaras for three days each. We removed all the product names from the bottles so they wouldn't be influenced by the brand.
- The Home Testers gave each mascara an overall rating and also a score for how easy it was to apply and the result achieved.
- To prompt them about things to consider when giving these scores, we asked the Home Testers to assess each mascara for how well it reached and coated fine hairs, how evenly it spread on their lashes, how quickly it dried and how long it took to wear off. They evaluated how easy it was to remove, how effective it was at curling, separating, lengthening and, of course, thickening their lashes, whether it smudged, clumped, flaked or ran, or if it irritated their eyes.

Instant Full Volume Comb, which rated 40% overall, and only 40% for the result achieved. Six out of its 15 trialists said this mascara clumped a lot. The RIMMEL has an unusual wand — a comb with very small teeth — which many of those who used it disliked ("... like using a paint trowel on your lashes," said one). Another said this mascara gave her "... the heavy drag-queen or Tammy-Faye Baker look ..." — something she wasn't really after. ■

Keeping the bugs at bay

Most mascaras contain preservatives to stop them going off. While a test conducted in 2005 by our German counterpart *Test* found two brands (not sold in Australia) that didn't contain adequate preservative, we found very little in a search of medical literature about recent reports of eye infections caused by mascara.

The microbiologist we consulted said to avoid infection, don't leave your mascara in a really hot place (say, the glovebox of your car) or share your make-up with anyone. Some manufacturers also warn against using it on irritated or scratched eyes, diluting it with any other substance or leaving the wand out of the bottle. And if your mascara changes in smell or appearance, bin it immediately.

Are they cruelty-free?

To find out if any of the brands in our trial don't test on animals, we checked the Choose Cruelty Free (CCF) Preferred Products List (PPL). The only brand from our mascara trial on this list was AUSTRALIS. According to CCF, AUSTRALIS products and ingredients haven't been tested on animals by the company, its suppliers or anyone on their behalf for at least five years before it applied for accreditation with CCF.

THE BODY SHOP used to be on the list but isn't any more, though it's still on the (less stringent) US-based People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) list, as are CLARINS, ESTÉE LAUDER and REVLON. For more about cosmetics and animal testing, see CHOICE, April 2006.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE			PRICE	
	Overall rating (%)	Easy to apply rating (%)	Result achieved rating (%)	Price (\$)	Price per mL or g (\$)
Mascara (in rank order)*					
CLARINS Wonder Volume (14)	80	80	80	40.00	5.71
ELIZABETH ARDEN Double Density Maximum Volume (12)	70	70	70	40.00	3.90
ESTÉE LAUDER Magnascope Maximum Volume (14)	70	70	70	46.00	5.11
LANCÔME Amplicils Full Dimension Volume (12)	70	70	70	48.50	7.46
SHISEIDO Advanced Volume (13)	70	70	70	48.00	8.00
AUSTRALIS Lash Magnitude Volumising (14)	60	80	50	9.95	0.87
MAX FACTOR 2000 Calorie (11)	60	70	60	20.85	2.32
MAYBELLINE Volum' Express Turbo Boost (13)	60	70	60	16.15	1.62
NAPOLEON Perdis Peep Show Madame Fantasia Volumising (14)	60	60	60	30.00	2.31
REVLON Fabulash (11)	60	70	60	19.95	2.53
THE BODY SHOP Volumising (13)	60	70	70	19.95	2.85
YVES SAINT LAURENT Luxurious Mascara for a False Lash Effect (11)	50	60	60	50.00	6.67
RIMMEL Xtreme Volume Instant Full Volume Comb (15)	40	60	40	14.95	2.99

WHERE'S L'OREAL?

The L'OREAL mascara that fell into the 'volumising' category is a 'two-step' product — a double-ended tube consisting of a white 'primer' at one end and the mascara at the other. Our market research only identified a few two-steps on the market at the time of our trial. We didn't include them because they're too obviously different from the other mascaras to be able to compare them fairly.

* Numbers in brackets indicate the number of Home Testers who tried each mascara.

Totally useless!

Will the whizbang new kitchen appliance — still in its original carton

sporting remnants of holly and tinsel — be condemned to the back of the cupboard for years to come? Joined by the odd wedding present that's never seen the light of day since you stored it — temporarily, of course — under the bed in the spare room? Judging by some of our subscribers' experiences, some gadgets seem to have been made for such lonely existence.

Electric wine chillers and ice shavers, aromatherapy diffusers and foot spas were rated the most useless in our survey of small appliances and gadgets. At least one in five of our survey respondents who had these gadgets found them of no use — in fact it was almost a third of those who had an electric wine chiller. Not surprisingly, electric wine chillers and aromatherapy diffusers were also the least used appliances, with 32% and 22% of respondents respectively indicating they'd never used the ones they own.

At the other end of the spectrum of perceived usefulness were USB flash drives and electric toothbrushes, which 77% and 76% respectively rated very useful, followed by portable car GPS systems (73%), universal remote controls (68%) and rice cookers (67%).

Late last year 940 CHOICE subscribers (females outnumbering males two to one) participated in this survey. They rated the gadgets they owned and indicated how often they used them. The table reveals the results. Let it be your guide when you next go appliance shopping for friends and family. ■

HOW USEFUL IS THIS PRODUCT? WHAT SUBSCRIBERS THINK

Product (number of respondents in brackets)	Of no use (%)	Somewhat useful (%)	Fairly useful (%)	Very useful (%)
Electric wine chiller (31)	32	29	26	13
Aromatherapy diffuser (114)	23	25	28	24
Electric ice shaver (47)	21	28	19	32
Foot spa (217)	20	38	21	21
Ice cream maker (73)	16	40	22	22
Vertical grill (63)	16	21	22	41
Milk frother (handheld) (136)	15	34	27	24
Pedometer (267)	14	27	29	30
Electric can opener (121)	13	20	16	51
Deep-fat fryer (171)	12	27	25	36
Electric pepper mill (42)	12	19	12	57
PDA (personal digital assistant) (121)	12	9	23	56
Drip filter coffee maker (229)	11	29	24	36
Electric back massage cushion (101)	11	37	22	30
Electric massager (149)	11	32	34	23
Epilator (91)	10	13	22	55
Pie maker (113)	10	40	26	24
Popcorn maker (129)	9	27	31	33
Body-fat monitor (54)	8	33	26	33
Milkshake maker (177)	8	27	35	30
Vacuum-packaging machine (49)	8	16	27	49
Breadmaker (355)	7	30	25	38
Coffee grinder (245)	7	24	21	48
Espresso / cappuccino machine (232)	7	22	17	54
Handheld vacuum cleaner (517)	7	22	22	49
Electric knife (445)	6	30	28	36
Hair styler / curling wand (197)	6	22	19	53
Portable GPS car navigation system (90)	6	7	14	73
Juicer (436)	5	27	31	37
Universal remote control (167)	5	16	11	68
Electric frypan (542)	4	15	25	56
Electric wok (200)	4	15	25	56
Health grill (313)	4	12	30	54
Rice cooker (316)	4	10	19	67
Slow cooker (338)	4	21	28	47
Hair straightener (158)	3	13	24	60
Electric toothbrush (443)	2	9	13	76
Toaster oven (171)	2	17	29	52
Benchtop mixer (553)	1	12	28	59
Sandwich maker / panini press (625)	1	12	32	55
USB flash drive / key (352)	1	6	16	77



GENE ROSS

None of these systems is suitable for playing at high volume.

Low-impact sound

test

The whole point of a home theatre system is to have cinema-type sound in your lounge room. None of the products in this test (priced between \$749 and \$900) is going to manage that if your room is much bigger than a bathroom.

What it's supposed to sound like

In the cinema you expect explosions to have impact, voices to sound natural and when the orchestra strikes up you want to be transported to the concert hall. Achieving this is more complicated than it sounds, but there's a standard that describes what cinemas should be able to manage.

The loudest sounds from an individual speaker in a cinema should be around 103 dB, which is very loud — roughly equivalent to having Jack Nicholson bellowing "You can't handle the truth!" at you from about half a metre away. As a general rule this is too loud for most living rooms, so we've chosen a more listenable level of 93 dB, which is closer to what you'd expect from a symphony orchestra if you were sitting in the stalls. Remember this is the loudest sound; most of the soundtrack of a movie will be at a significantly lower volume.

A home theatre system should be able to deliver sound at this volume and keep it sounding natural. Jack would lose some impact if he sounded like his voice was breaking when he was at full bellow.

Using our reference volume of 93 dB, we calculated how far the speakers would have to be from where you sit to achieve it. Sadly, it's not very far.

Low-powered results

None of these systems is suitable for placing at the edges of a big room or playing at high volume, and most would be struggling in even modest lounge rooms.

The overall best performer is the YAMAHA, which is a well balanced system in terms of frequency response, but if you want even moderately loud distortion-free sound (87 dB) you'll need to sit only a little over one metre from each speaker. At even more modest volume it can cope with a bigger setup.

The loudest system in this test is the TOSHIBA, but it has a large gap in its frequency response and the listening panel wasn't impressed. There's not much point having low distortion at high volumes if the whole spectrum of audible sound isn't there to begin with. Similarly the next loudest, the LG and SAMSUNG, have noticeable faults. However, the SAMSUNG's styling and ease of use

WHAT TO BUY	
With DVD player SONY DAVD Z720	\$849
Without DVD player YAMAHA YHT 2755	\$849

may be appealing and the listening panel thought it just acceptable (see the photo, page 34).

See *About the rest*, page 36, for why the others didn't make it into the *What to buy* list, and the table below for comparative speaker distances at a given volume.

Setting up

These products come as a number of components, some of which may need to be assembled — it's likely to take some time to get it all working. So having clear instructions with helpful diagrams is important.

Most provide useful guides, but the PANASONIC SCHAT60 has only a limited table of contents and no index, which makes it hard to find what you need, and entering key sequences can be tedious. The PHILIPS documentation is unclear in places as well. >

HOME THEATRE SYSTEMS

IN A NUTSHELL

- At this price you'll have to compromise on volume if you want quality sound without distortion.
- Setup can be tedious, but automated systems can work well.

MODEL	DISTANCE BETWEEN SPEAKERS (m)		
	Very loud (93 dB)	Loud (87 dB)	Moderate (81 dB)
Brand/model (in rank order within groups), at 2% THD			
With DVD player			
Sony DAVD Z720	1.5	3.0	6.0
Samsung HT XQ100	1.7	3.3	6.6
Panasonic SCHAT895	0.9	1.9	3.7
Sony DAVD Z3K	1.6	3.2	6.3
LG LH-T9656	1.7	3.4	6.8
Philips HTS 3455	1.4	2.9	5.7
Toshiba SD63 HK	2.2	4.4	8.7
Without DVD player			
Yamaha YHT 2755	1.1	2.1	4.2
Kenwood SAT6110	0.9	1.7	3.5
Panasonic SCHAT60	0.9	1.8	3.6

Distances are from speaker to speaker, front to rear. The listener is assumed to be half this distance from each speaker.

Connecting speakers to the amplifier is a tedious task, especially if you're trying to hide the wires from view. It's easy to cross wires when running them under floors or carpet — and crossing wires would result in a drop in sound quality.

The Samsung has a distinctive design that may appeal to some, but its DVD player has a slot at the top where the discs are put in. This means the main unit must have enough room above it to allow you to put in a disc.



> Connecting speakers to the amplifier is a tedious task, especially if you're trying to hide the wires from view. It's easy to cross wires when running them under floors or carpet, so having a clear indication of which wire goes in which slot is important. Unfortunately, the KENWOOD and YAMAHA don't come with clearly marked wires so it's more likely you could get them crossed. Crossing wires means the speaker would have its phase reversed, which would result in a drop in sound quality.

All these systems come with five speakers (one centre, two front and two rear), and the KENWOOD and YAMAHA each have an extra rear centre speaker. They all also have a subwoofer to handle low frequencies.

Once the speakers and main units are connected and placed as close as possible to the ideal distance from the listener, you need to balance the system to make sure each speaker delivers the same volume. All products in this test have a manual procedure in which the system produces a tone from each speaker in turn so you can vary its volume setting in relation to the others. Professional installers would use both their ears and a sound meter to do this; your ears are cheap and generally pretty effective.

Both SONY products come with an automated system that uses a supplied microphone, placed in your



what to look for

- It's impossible to measure sound quality objectively in a store, but you can rely on your hearing to a large degree.

Take along a CD or DVD with music you know well and play it on the systems the store already has set up. Don't be afraid to turn it up loud. Even though you may rarely listen to music at high volume, it'll be very disappointing if the product you buy can't hack it on the odd occasion when you really want to get rocking.

Listen for smooth transitions from low to high notes. Low notes shouldn't be boomy or have only one tone and highs shouldn't be harsh or screechy.

If the store has a listening room ask for the speakers to be placed in roughly the configuration they're likely to have in your room. It's marvellous what difference a metre can make (see *Low-powered results*, page 33).

Where it's not possible to hear the system before you get it home, get the store to agree that you can bring it back if you're unhappy with the sound. If they won't agree, look elsewhere.

- If you're looking for a system with a DVD player, check it can handle all the music and video formats you're likely to play and the regions you're likely to buy DVDs from. All the products in this test with a player can handle MP3 and JPEG and all except the TOSHIBA can play DivX.

Only the SONYs can't play WMA. The LG and SAMSUNG are restricted to regions 2, 3, 4 and 0; the rest can play all regions.

- If you're into VCD, the LG, PHILIPS, SAMSUNG, both SONYs and TOSHIBA can use them, but only the first two can play the slightly better-quality SVCD.
- Does the system need separate power to the subwoofer or rear speaker? This could be a problem if you don't have enough power points in your room.
- Automatic calibration is a great help when setting up a system. Both the SONY products in this test have it and it worked well.
- Check that all the connectors and cables needed for the system are included — they were for all the products in this test. Extras like this can add up quickly if you have to buy them separately.
- Check the connections you'll need to hook up to your existing or proposed TV.
- Remote controls should have all the necessary functions for using the system so you don't need to keep getting up to change settings.
- The display and controls on the main unit should also be easy to understand and use, as well as comprehensive so you can still use the system should you lose the remote.



normal sitting position, to balance the speakers. The system plays the sounds and calibrates itself. In both cases this worked quite well, but the SONY DAVD Z3K could be fooled into thinking the subwoofer was there when it wasn't.

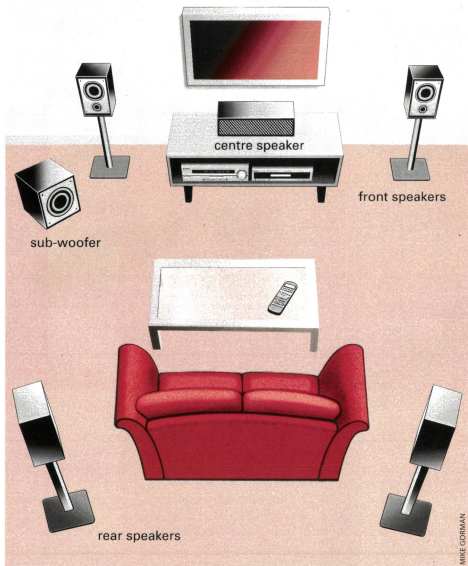
Whatever system you use it's always a good idea to listen to some music you're familiar with to ensure the balance is to your liking.

If you can't place all the speakers the same distance from the listening position, you'll need to introduce some time delay, so the speakers close to you don't sound out of sync. This is usually done by entering the distance each speaker is from the listener, and all these products can do this. >

Setting up your home theatre

Ideally all speakers would be placed at roughly the same distance from you, but chances are they won't be and your room will look more like this diagram. The following tips can help you optimise the sound from your home theatre system.

- The best position for your front speakers is at ear level (when you're seated), as soundtracks are likely to be optimised for that location.
- The rear speakers are best positioned to the side and slightly behind and above the listener.
- The centre speaker handles most dialogue and sounds from the central focus of the picture. It should be on or just below the TV.
- The subwoofer can be placed on the floor almost anywhere in the room, as most people can't tell where a bass sound is coming from. Experiment with the location, as small placement adjustments can make a big difference to sound quality.
- If your speakers aren't equidistant they'll need to be calibrated. All systems enable you to change relative volume levels on each speaker and to delay the sound so it's synchronised — but it's a tricky job and could take you some time.



The loudest sounds from an individual speaker in a cinema should be around 103 dB, which is too loud for most living rooms, but a home theatre system should be able to deliver sound at around 93 dB and keep it sounding natural.



profiles

The models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order within groups.

SONY DAVD Z720

Price: \$849

Has a DVD player

Good points

- Effective automatic calibration.
- Comprehensive and easy-to-use documentation.
- Colour-coded plugs and clearly marked wires.

Bad points

- Front panel display shows unnecessary text when in standby mode.
- The meaning of some icons on the onscreen display isn't clear.
- Intermittent fan noise.
- No headphone socket

Sound summary

- Bass tends to sound boomy. One listener thought the sound was thin overall.



YAMAHA YHT 2755

Price: \$849

No DVD player

Good points

- Much the best sound quality.
- Comprehensive and easy-to-use manuals.
- Good front panel display.

Bad points

- Speaker wires not clearly marked for setup.
- Large, heavy main unit.

Sound summary

- Overall integration from low to high is good, but lacks some punch in the bass.



about the rest

- The SAMSUNG is easy to use and has a quite distinctive design, but is let down by its relatively poor sound quality.
- The PANASONIC SCHT895 isn't as easy to use as the SAMSUNG, SONY DAVD Z720 and YAMAHA.
- While it's fairly easy to use and has a good auto-calibration system, our listening panel thought the SONY DAVD 23K was a bit harsh or honky with some material.
- The LG's bass is unbalanced and it sends stereo to the rear speakers, which the panel found distracting.
- The PHILIPS and TOSHIBA scored poorly both for technical sound and with the listening panel.
- Of the models without a DVD player, the KENWOOD and PANASONIC SCHT60 were equal to the SONY DAVD Z720 for their frequency score, but none can match the YAMAHA and neither is easy to use.



MODEL	PERFORMANCE						FEATURES		SPECIFICATIONS				
Brand/model (in rank order within groups)	Overall score (%)	Listening panel score (%)	Frequency response score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Standby power score (%)	Error correction score (%)	Microphone socket	Headphone socket	Number of speakers	Subwoofer	Radio tuner	Contact	Price (\$)
With DVD player													
Sony DAVD Z720	71	65	60	74	100	60	✓		5.1	Passive	AM / FM	1300 13 7669	849
Samsung HT XQ100	68	53	60	81	90	75		✓	5.1	Passive	FM	1300 369 600	799
Panasonic SCHAT895	65	59	60	66	90	80		✓	5.1	Passive	AM / FM	132 600	769
Sony DAVD Z3K	65	56	50	73	100	70	✓		5.1	Passive	AM / FM	1300 13 7669	749
LG LH-T9656	62	59	50	65	90	80	✓ (2)	✓	5.1	Passive	AM / FM	1800 725 375	749
Philips HTS 3455	56	50	40	62	90	70	✓		5.1	Active	AM / FM	1300 651 993	799
Toshiba SD63 HK	50	43	40	66	40	100		✓	5.1	Active	AM / FM	1300 733 962	899
Without DVD player													
Yamaha YHT 2755	73	71	70	69	100	na		✓	6.1	Active	AM / FM	1300 739 411	849
Kenwood SAT6110	63	64	60	55	90	na		✓	6.1	Active	AM / FM	1800 251 697	899
Panasonic SCHAT60	62	56	60	59	100	na		✓	5.1	Passive	AM / FM	132 600	769



HOW WE TESTED

- Each product was set up so that the speakers were the same distance from the listener and at around head height. We put the subwoofer on the floor close to the left front speaker.
- We calibrated using a sound meter to ensure the sound levels were the same at the listening position.
- Our expert panel then appraised the sound quality when playing stereo sound, DVD surround-sound music and a number of DVD surround-sound movie sequences. In particular, they listened for distortion, how well the subwoofer dealt with low frequencies and whether there was a seamless crossover from the speakers to the subwoofer when producing lower frequencies. They moved around to check the size of the 'sweet spot' (where the sound balances and sounds best), and assessed the ability of the system to localise individual sounds, so they appear to be coming from a particular direction.
- We used some technical tests to measure the maximum volume the system can produce without noticeable distortion (for the technically minded, a total harmonic distortion (THD) of 2% for both speakers and subwoofer). See the table on page 33, which shows how close to the speakers you have to sit achieve three different loudness levels.
- Frequency response tests were done to show the system's ability to produce tones across the spectrum of human hearing (from 20 Hz to 20 kHz). Failure to produce tones evenly can result in unpleasant sounds or even loss of some frequencies.
- Ease of use assessment included the remote control, front panel display and controls, onscreen displays where applicable, radio tuning, ease of setting up and whether the documentation supplied is clear and useful.
- We measured the power each machine uses in standby mode or equivalent (when it's been turned off by the remote control but is still connected to the power) — the less power the better.
- We tested how well the DVD player (if there was one) can handle a DVD with imperfections. We played our specially made test disc, which has a range of simulated scratches and dirt. We also checked whether it could play DVDs from regions other than the one for Australia (region 4).

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Listening panel score: 35%
- Frequency response score: 20%
- Ease of use score: 35%
- Standby power score: 10%

Standby power score The TOSHIBA scores poorly because its subwoofer stays on when the rest of the system is in standby mode.

Error correction score All the models with a DVD player got a reasonable or better score for this, so it isn't included in the overall score.

Microphone socket For karaoke.

Headphone socket For private listening.

Number of speakers/subwoofer The 1 in the number is for the subwoofer, which either draws its power directly from the system's amplifier (passive) or has its own (active).

Price Recommended retail as of November 2006.



Good health!

Is low-carb beer really any better for you than regular beer?

Carlton and United Breweries claims that, "With 70% less carbohydrates than a regular beer, PURE BLONDE is a smart choice for beer lovers who want to maintain a healthy lifestyle but don't want to sacrifice on taste." But unless cutting carbs is your priority for some reason, it's kilojoules that really count (see CHOICE, August 2005, for more on why low-carb diets aren't the way to go).

A beer gut isn't just unattractive but also a health hazard, and it comes from too much energy (kilojoules) from all food and drink sources, not just carbs (and not just beer). Choosing low-carb beer is certainly one way of enjoying a beer with fewer kilojoules — a bottle (355 mL) of PURE BLONDE gives you 444 kJ compared with about 550 kJ from the same amount of regular beer.

But alcohol delivers over one and a half times the kilojoules as the same weight of carbs, so light beers (less than 3% alcohol) are in fact a better choice from a weight point of view. A 375 mL bottle of light beer gives you only about 400 kJ — and it's cheaper (it's taxed at a lower rate).

McDonalds new McOil

It's excellent news but somewhat scary to contemplate that by reducing the amount of artery-clogging trans fat in its deep-frying oil from around 8% to less than 1%, McDonalds will remove 415 tonnes of trans fat from Australia's food supply in 2007. That's a lot of fries we're having with that. For more on trans fat and why we should eat a lot less of it, see CHOICE, April 2005.

Beans for the bone-idle

HEINZ has taken convenience food to a new level with the development of a ready-made baked beans 'toastie'. If opening a can of baked beans, heating them and pouring them on a piece of toast seemed too much of a bother for you before, this is sure to put a smile on your face. The new product reportedly features "a wodge of beans sealed in their frozen sauce between two slices of bread". To cook, you just pop it in the toaster for around 60 seconds, and Bob's your uncle.

But quick-cuisine lovers out there shouldn't get too excited, as the baked beans toastie isn't guaranteed to hit Australian shelves. It was recently launched in New Zealand, and only if successful there may go on sale elsewhere. In this case the UK — the world's biggest bean-eating nation — will no doubt be next in line.

If it takes off, however, we think this fibre-filled snack will give Pop-Tarts a run for their money — in more ways than one.



Home free



test

CORDESS PHONES

Cordless phones are extremely popular these days. Thanks to the whenever, wherever abilities that mobile phones have given us, when we're at home the idea of being rooted to one spot using a landline doesn't appeal much any more. And with polyphonic ringtones, SMS compatibility and slim handsets, plenty of the phones on test could be accused of masquerading as mobiles.

Cordless means using the phone anywhere in the house, privacy and flexibility. You can take a call while you garden or cook and it's perfect for grumpy teenagers who want to be alone when they chat all night to friends.

As handy as they are, though, don't forget they need to run off mains power, so it pays to keep at least one normal landline phone in case the power's down.

Lost in transmission

Got a lot of wireless products at home, such as a baby monitor, home security monitor, wireless laptop computer — or even just a microwave? You may find that you get some interference between them and certain cordless phones.

Phones that are marked as DECT run on the 1.8 GHz frequency, which no other appliances use, so this might be the type to look out for if your home is full of wireless gadgets.

Other formats such as WDECT and DSS use what are called ISM bands at either 5.8 GHz or 2.4 GHz. These might result in some problems, particularly from microwaves, which emit a 2.4 GHz frequency when they're in action.

So it's worth considering the appliances in the rest of your household when deciding which cordless phone to buy. >



what to look for

- Before you buy, add up the ringer equivalence numbers (REN) of the equipment you already have connected to your phone line. Any phone, fax, answering machine, modem or similar appliance will draw on the line's capacity. The amount drawn is the REN, which is usually printed on the bottom of the appliance. Generally, phone lines have a maximum REN of 3. If the sum of the REN of your appliances exceeds this, they may not work properly — for example, your phone mightn't ring.
- Try the handset before you buy to make sure it's not too small or too heavy, that it's comfortable to hold and fits well to your face.
- If you live in a large house or one that has several storeys, consider a phone that supports multiple handsets so you can have one on each floor or at different ends of the house. Some models also let you make free calls from handset to handset just like an intercom. Check the table (page 40) for details of which models have this feature.
- Alternatively you can look for a model that has a dial pad and speaker on its base so you can also make calls from there.
- If you tend to make long calls or need to take notes, a headset can be handy. In this test the PANASONIC KX-TG2631 and KX-TG5931, UNIDEN WDECT 2355, DSS57855 and DSS3455, DORO 680R and MOTOROLA have a headset connection.

- Look for clearly labelled, large keys and a backlit keypad; this is handy if you need to use the phone in poor light.
- While many of the tested phones can support SMS/texting, currently the service is limited to the Telstra network, and to Optus customers using Telstra lines (not the Optus cable) and texting only to Telstra phones.

Features they (almost) all have

- Answering machine
- Default outgoing message, except the BINATONE and MOTOROLA.
- Out-of-range warning, except the DORO 630R and PANASONIC KX-TG5931.
- Caller ID.
- Mute.
- Key lock, except the PANASONIC KX-TG5931 and UNIDEN DSS57855.
- Last number redial.
- Adjustable ringer volume.
- Adjustable 'receive speech' volume, except the DORO 630R.
- Ringer off.
- Low-battery indicator.
- LCD display.
- Call waiting compatible.

IN A NUTSHELL

- Most of the cordless phones tested work well enough, so the best way to choose is to look for features that suit your lifestyle.

While many of the tested phones can support SMS/texting, currently the service is limited to the Telstra network, and to Optus customers using Telstra lines (not the Optus cable) and texting only to Telstra phones.



WHAT TO BUY

PANASONIC KX-TG1840

This PANASONIC scored the highest overall and in several rating categories — including talk time, sound quality, ease of use — and it has a good range of features. It's also a DECT phone and so shouldn't cause interference with other wireless appliances.

Price: \$179

Good points

- Best for sound quality and talk time, equal best for ease of use, second best for battery life, equal second for the answering machine.
- Out-of-range warning.
- You can record conversations, though legally you must tell the other party if you're doing this.

Bad points

- Its maximum range of 400 metres outdoors isn't as long as most other models, but it would be fine for an average-sized house.
- The phone doesn't answer automatically when it's picked up from the base, so you need to hit the answer button on the handset first.



about the rest

- The four phones below the recommended PANASONIC KX-TG1840 in the table (the PANASONIC KX-TG5931, UNIDEN DECT1855, DORO 680R and PANASONIC KX-TG2631) are quite good phones, though the DORO has a standby time of only 5.5 days, one of the lowest among the tested models, and the PANASONIC KX-TG2631 has the shortest talk time of 5.5 hours. However, this PANASONIC is the cheapest of the top five models at \$99.
- The BINATONE and TELSTRA F5150 SMS rated among the poorest for their answering machines, and the TELSTRA has a very quiet ringer that was hard to hear in another room, but otherwise they're worth considering. They cost a relatively low \$100 and \$90 respectively, and with the BINATONE that includes two handsets.
- The rest of the tested models were let down by their battery score, which mainly translates into lower talk or standby times, and their sound quality and/or answering machine.

MODEL	PERFORMANCE											FEATURES			
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Battery score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Range score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Answering machine score (%)	Talk time (hours)	Standby time (days)	Recharge time (hours)	Range (outside / inside 1 / inside 2, m)	Ringer loudness (max, dB)	Backlit keypad	SMS-compatible	Handsets supported	Ring tones
Panasonic KX-TG1840	73	77	79	74	67	59	22.5	9.5	5.0	400 / 55 / 100	76	✓	✓	6	15
Panasonic KX-TG5931	67	79	63	69	65	59	13.0	14.0	3.5	600 / 65 / 70	76	✓		1	7
Uniden DECT1855	67	71	69	74	58	58	19.5	6.5	2.5	550 / 50 / 100	79			6	10
Doro 680R	66	62	72	70	63	56	16.0	5.5	5.0	550 / 40 / 100	76	✓	✓	5	20
Panasonic KX-TG2631	66	70	60	77	64	53	5.5	12.5	2.0	650 / 55 / 100	78	✓		1	7
Binatone Fusion 2210 Twin	64	70	67	72	59	41	22.0	7.5	7.0	550 / 45 / 100	73			5	5
Telstra F5150 SMS	63	69	67	65	60	44	11.0	11.0	4.5	600 / 45 / 80	62		✓	5	5
Telstra F5400a	61	51	63	76	59	51	11.5	5.5	9.0	550 / 55 / 100	76		✓	5	5
Doro 630R	60	55	69	62	57	41	13.0	6.5	9.0	550 / 40 / 80	74			4	6
Motorola ME4066-2	60	54	67	72	49	48	10.5	5.5	6.0	400 / 50 / 100	80			4	10
Telstra F5200a	59	53	63	70	56	44	11.5	6.5	9.0	550 / 50 / 90	71		✓	5	10
Uniden D557855	58	58	42	72	67	61	6.5	10.0	8.0	550 / 65 / 80	77	✓		10	20
Uniden WDECT2355	58	56	55	62	63	55	9.0	9.5	10.0	550 / 50 / 70	79	✓	✓	4	20
Uniden D553455	56	58	43	67	64	53	9.5	11.0	11.5	600 / 50 / 80	79	✓		4	20



HOW WE TESTED

- To see how long the battery would last we set the phones first to talk and then on standby and timed how long they kept going for each. We also timed how long they took to recharge.
- We assessed speech clarity, speech loudness, line noise and background noise reduction on each model, with a panel of three users making calls in a moderately noisy environment.
- To test the maximum distance from the base station where you can still have an intelligible conversation (their range), we used them outside with a direct line of sight to the base.
- Indoors we tested the phones' range with the impact of walls and other obstructions to a range of 100 m — we made calls through plasterboard and wooden walls ('Inside 1' in the table), as well as through brick ('Inside 2').
- For ease of use we considered factors such as how clear the instruction manual is, the feel and comfort of the handset, how easy it is to clean, if the LCD screen is easy to read and any special features.
- To test the answering machines we set the time and date, recorded an outgoing message, checked to see if the settings were still there after a power failure, assessed how easy it was to listen to, manage and delete messages and checked the storage capacity for messages. We also assessed sound quality.

Cordless phones: no health risk

Concern about the safety of mobile phones and radiation have led to questions about the safety of cordless phones — even though, according to the Australian Government's Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency, there's no substantiated evidence that using a mobile phone does any harm.

Cordless phones, which are much lower-powered devices than mobiles, only need to transmit signals over a relatively short distance to the receiver in your home or office. Currently there's no evidence to suggest that using a cordless phone can be a health hazard.

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Battery: 20%
- Sound quality: 30%
- Range: 20%
- Ease of use: 20%
- Answering machine: 10%

SMS-compatible, REN: More information on these is given in *What to look for*, page 39.

Type/frequency band: See *Lost in*

transmission, page 39, for why this might matter.

Batteries: If the phone doesn't use AAA batteries (rechargeable or non-rechargeable) it has a dedicated rechargeable battery pack.

Price: Recommended retail as of November 2006.

ns Not stated.

(A) This phone comes with two handsets.

				SPECIFICATIONS						
Phone from base station	Calls between handsets	Hearing aid compatible	Phone book memories	Type / frequency band (GHz)	REN	Answering machine storage capacity	Uses two AAA batteries	Contact	Price (\$)	
✓			200	DECT 1.8	0.5	15 min / 64 messages	✓	www.panasonic.com.au	179	
			50	DSS 5.8	0.5	15 min / 64 messages		www.panasonic.com.au	149	
	✓	✓	100	DECT 1.8	0.1	15 min	✓	www.uniden.com.au	119	
	✓	✓	200	DECT 1.8	0.5	15 min	✓	www.doro.com.au	130	
			50	DSS 2.4	0.5	15 min / 64 messages		www.panasonic.com.au	99	
	✓		40	DECT 1.8	1.0	6 min	✓	www.binatone.com.au	100 (A)	
			50	DECT 1.8	0.1	11.5 min (max 3 min / msg)	✓	http://shop.telstra.com	90	
	✓		100	DECT 1.8	0.1	15 min (max 3 min / msg)	✓	http://shop.telstra.com	110	
	✓		30	DECT 1.8	0.5	15 min (max 3 min / msg)	✓	www.doro.com.au	80	
	✓		30	DECT 1.8	ns	40 min	✓	www.oricom.com.au/motocordless/	169 (A)	
			50	DECT 1.8	0.1	11 min (max 3 min / msg)	✓	http://shop.telstra.com	90	
✓	✓	✓	100	DSS 5.8	0.1	12 min / 59 messages		www.uniden.com.au	179	
✓	✓		100	WDECT 2.4	0.1	14 min		www.uniden.com.au	129	
✓	✓	✓	100	DSS 2.4	0.1	10 min / 59 messages		www.uniden.com.au	179	

Kiss of death

It made news headlines around the world when a Canadian teenager allegedly died from an allergic reaction brought about by a kiss from her boyfriend, who'd eaten peanut butter on toast hours earlier.

As it turns out, her death was actually the result of a severe asthma attack. And because nine hours had passed between when the boy ate peanut butter and when he kissed his girlfriend, the coroner's finding was that the kiss and the girl's death were unrelated. He referred to new research to support his verdict.

US researchers got volunteers to eat two tablespoons of peanut butter on a sandwich, and saliva samples were collected at various time points afterwards. They found that after one hour peanut allergen was undetectable in 87% of participants. For the remaining participants, the maximum amount detected after one hour was a hundred times below the lowest dose reported to cause an allergic reaction. And none had detectable levels just less than four hours later, following a peanut-free lunch.

It's not uncommon, however, for someone with peanut allergy to suffer an allergic reaction after sharing utensils with or kissing someone who's just eaten peanuts, and the reaction can be severe. So it's important that if you have an allergy to peanuts you're aware of the risks.



GENE ROSS

NUTRIGENETICS VS CRYSTAL BALL

If you've ever wondered what the future holds for your health and have discounted consulting a crystal ball, the emerging science of nutrigenetics could well be of interest to you.

As science unravels more information on how genes contribute to some diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes, websites offering DIY DNA test kits have sprung up all over the net.

You get a kit to send a sample of your DNA (usually a swab of the inside of your cheek) and the companies send back dietary and lifestyle advice supposedly tailored to your genetic make-up.

But a study by the US Government Accountability Office selected four sites that offered gene analysis and personalised dietary and lifestyle advice, costing between \$US89 and \$US395. This snapshot sample of internet gene testing kits found their results to be misleading at best — some were even just scams to sell expensive vitamin pills.

You can download a copy of the study at www.gao.gov, but the main findings were that the reports were little more than meaningless predictions and general advice to eat healthily, exercise and stop smoking. Two of the sites also pushed 'personalised' dietary supplements, one charging over \$US1000 for about \$US35 worth of supermarket-equivalent vitamins.

The study concluded that nutrigenetic test kits like those it looked at promise results they can't deliver and may mislead and needlessly alarm consumers.

So the mists are indeed clearing ... don't get ripped off.

What's up, doc?

Good communication can really make a difference to our health. Our chances of getting an accurate diagnosis, the right treatment and a good understanding of what's happening to us, all depend on communicating well with the doctor.

But not all health professionals are good communicators themselves, and many consumers aren't used to being involved in their own healthcare. So experts at the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) have put together a toolkit to help deal with these issues.

The guide suggests preparing a list of questions to ask your doctor, including: "What are my options?"; "What exactly does this procedure, test, treatment or surgery involve?"; "What are the side effects of each of the options?"; and "How much will each test or treatment cost?" It also explains how, by communicating better with your doctor, it can help you build trust and a good rapport. This has the knock-on effect of meaning you're more likely to keep medical appointments, follow an agreed plan for treatment and be more satisfied with your healthcare, among other things.

The guide is called *Making decisions about tests and treatments: principles for better communication between healthcare consumers and healthcare professionals*. You can download it free from the NHMRC website at www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/. It's also important to have a positive and ongoing relationship with your doctor. For more on this, see *Choosing a GP*, page 20.



Think you've got convict blood in your family? With a little family history research, you can find out.

A family tree program creates a sophisticated database that records your family history and can be used to analyse it in a variety of ways.

CHOICE Computer (Nov/Dec 2006) tested 11 family tree programs for ease of use, performance and range of features. Here's a rundown of the features we looked for in the tested programs.

- **Audit:** Checks entries for unlikely details, such as birth date after marriage date or children born before parents.
- **Calculator:** Works out dates and provides a written description of the relationship between any two people.

- **Calendar:** Records birthdays and anniversaries so you won't forget important events.
- **Charts:** Creates a chart of descendants or ancestors from multiple generations.
- **Customise:** Groups people together other than by family relationship.
- **Database:** Creates a central repository of information that can be saved, imported and exported into other programs.
- **Duplications:** You might slip up and enter the same person twice; the program can find and delete duplicate entries.
- **Fields:** You can record information, such

as births, deaths, marriages, and expand to more than 30 event fields.

- **Flexibility:** The programs can handle complex, non-nuclear family arrangements such as adoptions, multiple marriages, stepchildren, de facto relationships, name changes and same-sex relationships.
- **GEDCOM:** The global standard file format for family tree software. The current version is 5.5.
- **Groups:** Creates charts for family groups showing parents and children.
- **Index:** Makes lists of individuals and analyses the information.
- **Multimedia:** Stores audio and video files for individuals.
- **One-click:** Adds a new person with a single click.
- **Output:** Generates reports and charts in a standard file format such as PDF.
- **Print preview:** Lets you view and check charts and trees before printing.
- **Search:** Looks for a specific name.
- **Soundex:** Allows you to group names that sound the same, but are spelt differently, using a common code.
- **Source:** Records the source of data, such as birth certificate, newspaper article or oral history interview.
- **Time line:** Shows the events in someone's life against major points in time.
- **To do list:** Useful to note the next steps in your research for a particular person.

CHOICE Computer, Nov/Dec 2006, has full test results, features and information on how to get started with family history research. To subscribe, go to www.choice.com.au/magazines or call 1800 069 552 toll-free. ■

ON TEST

In rank order (overall score):

ROOTS MAGIC 3.0 (85%)	\$76 (www.gould.com.au)
FAMILY TREE MAKER Deluxe 13.0 (82%)	\$100 (www.mindscape.net.au)
GENBOX FAMILY HISTORY 3.6.5 (81%)	\$42 (www.gould.com.au)
PERSONAL ANCESTRAL FILE 5.2 (81%)	Free (www.familysearch.org)
LEGACY FAMILY TREE 6.0 Deluxe Edition (79%)	\$60 (www.vicgum.asn.au)
REUNION FOR MACINTOSH 8.0 (72%)	\$187 (www.vicgum.asn.au)
ANCESTRAL QUEST 11.0 (71%)	US\$35 (www.ancquest.com)
FAMILY HISTORIAN 3: family tree software in the 21st century (69%)	\$115 (www.gould.com.au)
THE MASTER GENEALOGIST Gold Edition 6.07 (66%)	\$118 (www.gould.com.au)
RELATIVELY YOURS 3.3 (60%)	\$73 (www.manacomm.com.au)
EZITREE Family History 8.76 (52%)	\$90 (www.ezitree.com.au)

WHAT TO BUY

- **PERSONAL ANCESTRAL FILE** is probably the best choice if you're unsure how far you want to go with family history research, because it's free to download and has a simple interface that's easy to use for beginners. At the same time it has enough features to create a complex family history database.
- **ROOTS MAGIC** rated highest for ease of use and, for Mac users, **REUNION** scored well for ease of use and isn't too daunting for a beginner.
- The ease of use rating for **FAMILY TREE MAKER Deluxe** and **GENBOX FAMILY HISTORY** was also very good.

Dishing the dirt

"All the products were good and we'd be happy to use any of them," said one of the participants in our latest dishwasher detergent trial, and many others agreed. It seems that with dishwasher detergent, there's very little noticeable difference in the performance of the products on test — they'll all do a pretty good job of cleaning your dishes.

But there's a big difference in price. The most expensive product in the trial — FINISH PowerBall 5 in 1 — cost 47 cents per load, compared to five cents for both the HOME BRAND and BLACK & GOLD powders. The HOME BRAND powder even scored the same as the FINISH for cleaning (a very good 86%). Despite this, the majority (72%) of our trialists said they normally use one of the more expensive FINISH dishwasher detergents — maybe these results will change their minds.

Some trialists said they prefer tablets to powder because they find them easier to use, but generally powders are much cheaper.

Green and clean?

Two of the products in the trial — HERBON and SQUEEK — claim to be environmentally friendly. Both powders rated very well, with an overall score of 81%, but they're a lot more expensive than any of the other powders and

IN A NUTSHELL

• There's no need to spend a fortune to get your dishes clean — overall our trialists didn't notice major differences between products, but there are big differences in price.



HOW WE TESTED

- 197 CHOICE Home Testers were sent four dishwasher detergents each. They used each one three times in their dishwasher on a 'normal' cycle, and rated each detergent for its cleaning performance and its ability to leave dishes streak-free. Then they gave it an overall score.
- As far as possible, products with a built-in rinse aid were sent to trialists who don't use rinse aid in their dispensers, as a 'double dose' of rinse aid can leave a cloudy film on dishes. However, some trialists did test products with a built-in rinse aid and also use rinse aid in their dishwasher dispenser. Generally, we found no significant difference in the scores of the detergents whether a 'double dose' of rinse aid was used or not.

even the LOGIX tablet. So will spending more for these detergents really make a difference to the environment?

We found that a very difficult question to answer. Manufacturers aren't required to list their ingredients on the packets and rarely provide a full ingredients list, so it's difficult for us, let alone an average shopper in the supermarket, to assess what environmental impact any detergent may have.

There's also little research in Australia about the effects of dishwasher detergent on the environment. Consequently there are conflicting claims about the harm caused by certain ingredients, such as phosphates. A number of countries are considering whether to ban phosphates in dishwasher detergent (as has been done with laundry detergent in many places) because an oversupply of phosphate in lakes and rivers can encourage the growth of blue-green algae, which can have severe environmental consequences.

However, others argue that the contribution of dishwasher detergent to the overall levels of phosphate in waste water are not as significant as other sources (such as fertilisers) and that the sewerage and recycling systems increasingly should be able to remove it from the water and reuse it on the land as a nutrient.

If you're concerned about the amount of phosphate in dishwasher detergent, you might want to try SQUEEK. It's the only product in the trial that's phosphate-free and it also comes in a small sachet (10 g), which is probably only about half the amount of powder you'd normally use for a heavily soiled load. "Surprised the small sachet cleaned so well. Impressed!" one trialist commented.

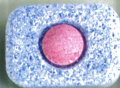
HERBON is the only product on test that's certified by



WHAT TO BUY

	Price per load (cents)
FINISH POWERBALL 5 in 1 (tablets)	47
COLES 3 IN 1 (tablets)	29
FINISH POWERBALL CLASSIC (tablets)	34
LOGIX DOUBLE ACTION (tablets)	BEST BUY 19
HOME BRAND (powder)	BEST BUY 5
BLACK & GOLD (powder)	BEST BUY 5





the Australian Environmental Labelling Association. This is a voluntary labelling standard and means a product can claim to meet certain environmental standards for ingredients and biodegradability. Not having the label doesn't mean other products don't meet the same standards, but you can be more confident about labelled products.

Detergent dangers

Dishwasher detergent is highly caustic and can cause severe burns if it's swallowed. Last year the National Drugs and Poisons Schedule Committee announced that all alkaline-salt dishwasher products with a very high pH (more than 12.5) were to be removed from the market. Products with a pH over 11.5 are still eye- and skin-corrosive and since 2005 these products have been required to have child-resistant caps.

But even products with a lower pH can cause serious harm, so if you have young children always remember to:

- Close the container properly and check the cap lock is properly in place (we've come across caps that require two clicks to be properly child-resistant, not just one).
- Store the detergent out of reach of young children, up high or in a locked cupboard.
- Put the detergent in the dishwasher just before the wash and clean out any residue afterwards. ■

Jargon buster

Many of the tablet detergents in the trial claim to be 3-in-1, 4-in-1 or even 5-in-1. These components can vary between products, but generally:

- **3-in-1** Tablets usually contain enzymes to break down food and grime, a rinse aid and a salt function to prevent limescale build-up in your dishwasher.
- **4-in-1** As with 3-in-1 and generally also an extra function to clean glasses.
- **5-in-1** Only one product in the trial calls itself 5-in-1 (FINISH PowerBall). The extra ingredient is described as a "PowerBoost Action" that helps to "remove encrusted stains".

Do these "added extras" really make a difference? This trial doesn't seem to indicate that they do: trialists didn't notice big differences between any of the products overall and one of the cheapest powders (HOME BRAND) scored equal highest for cleaning performance. As for the effectiveness of rinse aid, see *How we tested*, left.

PRODUCT		SCORES			FEATURES	COST
Product (the number in brackets is the number of trialists for each detergent)	Type	Overall score (%)	Cleaning score (%)	Streak-free score (%)	Contains rinse aid	Cost per load (cents)
Finish PowerBall 5 in 1 (27)	Tablet	86	86	87	✓	47
Coles 3 in 1 (28)	Tablet	85	84	83	✓	29
Finish PowerBall Classic (23)	Tablet	84	84	82		34
Logix Double Action (Aldi) (23)	Tablet	84	84	83		19
Home Brand Automatic (Woolworths) (26)	Powder	83	86	86		5
Black & Gold Automatic (IGA) (25)	Powder	81	82	82		5
Herbon (28)	Powder	81	82	81		25
Morning Fresh TecTabs (26)	Tablet	81	83	81	✓	29
Squeek Concentrate (22)	Powder in sachet	81	82	77	✓	25
Finish Power (24)	Powder	80	80	79		11
Kwit Double Action (21)	Powder	79	80	77		11
Kwit Triple Action (26)	Tablet	79	82	80	✓	30
Morning Fresh TecPowder (29)	Powder	79	81	79	✓	12
Coles Automatic (31)	Powder	76	78	76		9
Swift Auto (IGA) (22)	Tablet	74	75	75	✓	29
Logix Automatic (Aldi) (22)	Powder	73	77	74		8

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is a separate rating by the trialists, not a combination of the other scores.

Cost per load This is based on prices we found in supermarkets in August, September and October 2006. Prices vary regularly and the cost per load is only approximate.

Cleaning up

CHOICE sees a lot of dishwashers and few models do everything equally well: better washing, for instance, will tend to mean longer cycle times, and better drying often means lower energy efficiency.

Nevertheless, we found three newly tested models to recommend: the LG LD-1204W washes well, has excellent drying performance and is one of the cheaper machines to buy and run. Our testers also found it easy to use. Close on its heels were the WESTINGHOUSE SB915 and ELECTROLUX DISHLEX DX302, with the WESTINGHOUSE's forte being washing performance, and the DISHLEX excellent at drying. Neither rated terribly well for energy efficiency, but they're relatively water-efficient and topped the lot with their excellent ease of use scores.

Making life easier?

Dishwashers these days are designed to do more and more of the work for you, but are all these extra features really useful? Some are, some less so.

Many dishwashers claim to have a self-cleaning filter, but that may not be as impressive as it sounds. Even if a dishwasher's filter is nominally self-cleaning, we've found it still needs to be taken out and cleaned occasionally, and most manufacturers advise you to do this.

You can usually tell when the filter needs to be cleaned because your dishes don't come out as clean as they used to or there's an unpleasant smell when you open the dishwasher. So it's still a good idea to look for a



HOW WE TESTED

- Our testers check how well the machines tackle a full load of dirty dishes by measuring out and placing equal amounts of egg yolk, spinach and baby cereal on plates, butter on saucers, tomato juice in glasses and tea in cups. They also put egg yolk and cereal onto cutlery.
- It's all then left to dry for 15–18 hours before being loaded into the machines, washed (using the sensor wash if the machine has one or a normal cycle if it doesn't) and dried.
- Each machine is tested at least twice and the scores averaged.
- Testers also measure the amount of water and energy used in a cycle, and how easy it is to load the dishwasher.

machine with a filter that's easy to reach and remove for cleaning.

We're also seeing many more dishwashers with a 'sensor wash' feature. The sensor assesses the load and decides things like wash action, amount of water (and therefore energy to heat it) and cycle time. That means less decision-making and less user 'interaction' with the technology — definitely more appealing for some. The technology used for the sensor varies from machine to machine and some are better at assessing the load than others, but the machines with sensors in our test all work quite well.

IN A NUTSHELL

- All 10 newly tested dishwashers are good overall, and we can recommend three in particular.

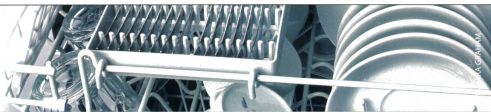
For people with a disability

An occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre (NSW) assessed the dishwashers for use by people with various disabilities. Of the newly tested models:

- If you have problems with your hands, wrists or arms, the LG is the most suitable. The on/off and start buttons are large and all controls are touch-sensitive, but we'd suggest checking how easy you find it to pull open the door.
- The WESTINGHOUSE SB915 is most suitable for people with vision problems as it has a different-coloured cutlery basket and handle on the top drawer.
- None of the newly tested machines is especially suitable without adaptations for someone with cognitive impairment, but the WHIRLPOOL Auto Clean 6th Sense can be programmed to operate with a relatively simple two-stage process (but see *What about the rest?*, right, for some drawbacks of this model).



GENE ROSS



profiles



LG LD-1204W

Price: \$849

Good points

- Excellent drying and good washing performance.
- Good energy and water efficiency.
- Very easy to use.
- The top basket height is easy to adjust.
- One of the most economical machines tested to buy and run.
- Displays how much time the program has left to run.
- The controls have a child lock.
- Has a delayed-start function.
- Has a covered heating element.

Bad points

- Can't fit large plates.
- One of the noisiest in the test.



ELECTROLUX DISHLEX DX302

Price: \$949 **BEST BUY**

Good points

- Excellent drying and good washing performance.
- Particularly easy to use.
- The top basket height is easy to adjust.
- Displays how much time the program has left to run.
- The door and controls have child locks.
- Has a delayed-start function.
- Has a covered heating element.

Bad points

- Can't fit large plates and tall glasses at the same time.



WESTINGHOUSE SB915

Price: \$949

Good points

- Very good washing and drying performance.
- Good water efficiency.
- Particularly easy to use.
- The top basket height is easy to adjust.
- Displays how much time the program has left to run.
- The door and controls have child locks.
- Has a delayed-start function.
- Has a covered heating element.

Bad points

- Can't fit large plates and tall glasses at the same time.
- Only scored 54% for energy efficiency.

GENE ROSS

Newly tested models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order. For profiles of other models in the list, see the July 2006 issue of *CHOICE* or go to choiceextra.com.au and click on Jul 06 under 'dishwashers'.

WHAT TO BUY

A Best Buy is a good performer with a reliable track record, whose purchase price and running cost combined are among the lowest in the test.

If price is most important to you, the CONIA CDW1211 (costing just \$499) is very cheap to buy and to run, and while it didn't make the *What to buy* list it still scored well overall. The LG LD-1204W (see below) is also a very good machine with a comparatively low price and running costs. Unfortunately we don't yet have reliability data for these brands and so can't call the LG a Best Buy.

MIELE G1220SC	\$1599
NEW LG LD-1204W	\$849
BOSCH Logixx AquaVario SGV67T13AU	\$2449
NEW ELECTROLUX DISHLEX DX302	BEST BUY \$949
NEW WESTINGHOUSE SB915	\$949

about the rest

As we've said, the new dishwashers in this test all did well overall. The table on page 48 shows where the various models' relative strengths and weaknesses lie.

Worth noting:

- The MIELE G1140SC is excellent at drying but a comparatively high user of energy, as is the ASKO.
- While the WHIRLPOOL ADP6940 Auto Clean 6th Sense has the highest water efficiency in the table, its wash performance is among the least impressive, and it isn't especially easy to use.
- The SIMPSON Eziset 52B850 only scored 64% for drying.

You'd probably be happy with the other newly tested models (see the models marked '#' in the table for details) if you found them for a good price.

We're seeing many more dishwashers with a 'sensor wash' feature. The sensor assesses the load and decides things like wash action, amount of water (and therefore energy to heat it) and cycle time.

TESTERS' TIPS

- Don't place the dirtiest items in the corners of the baskets as they're less likely to be cleaned properly.
- Check the spray arm won't be blocked by dishes during the cycle — it needs to move freely to supply water to wash and rinse the dishes.
- You don't have to rinse the dishes and plates before you load them, but don't go to the other extreme and not scrape them clean of food at all, or your machine will struggle to deliver the cleanest dishes.
- Wooden handles tend not to fare well in a dishwasher.

MODEL		PERFORMANCE								
	Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Washing score (%)	Drying score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Energy efficiency score (%)	Water efficiency score (%)	Energy used (kWh)	Water used (L)	Noise
	Miele G1220SC (A)	84	77	98	88	68	87	1.37	15	40
	Bosch Logixx AquaVario SGV67T13AU	82	72	97	88	69	87	1.34	15	40
	# LG LD-1204W	82	75	97	83	76	79	1.11	18	54
	# Electrolux Dishlex DX302 (A)	80	74	92	95	64	77	1.52	19	49
	# Westinghouse SB915 (A)	80	81	89	95	54	76	1.84	19	48
	Conia CDW1211	78	72	86	73	77	81	1.07	17	54
	# Westinghouse SB907 (A)	78	77	80	88	66	79	1.44	18	52
	# Miele G1140SC	77	75	90	78	60	76	1.63	19	41
	# Whirlpool ADP6940 Auto Clean 6th Sense (A)	77	68	89	66	68	96	1.36	12	41
	# Blanco BFDW6W	75	76	83	73	63	70	1.55	21	45
	Fisher & Paykel Dishdrawer DD603M (A)	75	69	86	83	66	76	1.44	19	53
	# Asko D3111-8 Steel System (A)	74	80	71	73	61	81	1.61	17	45
	Blanco BFDW4W (A)	73	70	80	45	74	84	1.17	16	48
	Electrolux EX500	72	70	73	83	68	73	1.35	20	44
	# Simpson Eziset 52B850	72	76	64	88	64	72	1.49	21	52
	Ariston LD87	70	69	58	79	78	76	1.04	19	48
	Fisher & Paykel Nautilus DW691ED WH (A)	70	78	42	70	87	80	0.74	18	44
	Bosch Classic Electronic SGS53EO2AU	68	65	65	61	80	74	0.97	20	45
	Fisher & Paykel Nemo DW681ES WH (A)	67	64	47	70	88	81	0.71	17	45

How reliable have subscribers found them?

We asked subscribers whether their dishwasher (bought in or after 1996) had needed repairs in the previous 12 months. Overall, one in seven had done, making dishwashers one of the most unreliable appliances in our survey. Even so, 79% of all respondents said they'd buy the same brand again.

Differences of 7% or more are meaningful. The numbers in brackets are the number of responses we received.

We're sorry we don't yet have reliability data for the following brands — ARISTON, CONIA, ELECTROLUX, LG and MAYTAG.

PERCENTAGE NOT NEEDING REPAIR

ALL DISHWASHERS (6466)	85
BOSCH (409)	92
MIELE (628)	92
AEG (179)	90
BLANCO (147)	89
SIMPSON (268)	89
DISHLEX (1463)	86
WHIRLPOOL (181)	86
KLEENMAID (225)	85
WESTINGHOUSE (331)	85
ASKO (592)	81
SMEG (168)	80
FISHER & PAYKEL (1273)	79



Rank	FEATURES							SPECIFICATIONS					COSTS	
	Washing time (min)	Height-adjustable top basket	Foldable / removable lines	Anti-flood device	Half-load option	Eco wash	Fast wash	Dimensions (H x W x D, cm)	Water connection	Place settings	Type	Contact	Running cost (\$ / 10 years)	Price (\$)
96	✓		F, R	✓			✓	85 x 60 x 60	C rec	12	FW	www.miele.com.au	806	1599
01	✓		F	✓			✓	81 x 60 x 57	C rec	14	BI	www.bosch.com.au	789	2449
06	✓		F	✓	✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	C rec	12	FW	www.lge.com.au	701	849
05	✓		F	✓		✓	✓	82 x 60 x 58	C rec	12	BI	www.electrolux.com.au	899	949
07	✓		F	✓		✓	✓	82 x 60 x 58	C rec	12	BI	www.electrolux.com.au	1078	949
09	✓		F, R	✓		✓	✓	85 x 60 x 58	H or C	12	FW	www.pebble-ltd.com.au	647	499
03	✓		F	✓		✓	✓	82 x 60 x 58	C rec	12	BI	www.electrolux.com.au	856	849
08	✓			✓			✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	12	FW (B)	www.miele.com.au	964	1399
48	✓		F	✓	✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	ns	12	FW	www.whirlpool.com.au	785	1249
03	✓		F	✓		✓	✓	82 x 60 x 57	C only	12	FW	www.blanco-australia.com	925	1330
26			R	✓	✓	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 57	C rec	12	BI	www.fp.com.au	909	2099
28				✓		✓	✓	82 x 60 x 57	ns	14	BI	www.asko.com.au	942	1349
05				✓		✓	✓	82 x 60 x 57	C rec	12	FW	www.blanco-australia.com	700	1119
58	✓		F	✓			✓	82 x 60 x 59	C rec	12	BI	www.electrolux.com.au	836	1429
15	✓		F	✓		✓		82 x 60 x 58	C rec	12	BI	www.electrolux.com.au	892	689
03	✓		F	✓	✓	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 60	C rec	12	FW	03 9557 4044	665	1799
05	✓		F	✓	✓	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 57	C rec	12	FW	www.fp.com.au	468	1049
06	✓		F	✓			✓	85 x 60 x 60	C rec	14	FW	www.bosch.com.au	605	1049
04	✓			✓			✓	85 x 60 x 60	C rec	12	FW	www.fp.com.au	454	899

ns Not stated.

(A) All the models in the table have the basic white finish except the Fisher & Paykel Dishdrawer DD603M (iridium), Ariston LD87 (grey) and Electrolux EK500 (stainless steel). Dishwashers with this footnote also have a version with a stainless steel finish, generally at a slightly higher price. Some also have other versions available.

(B) Also available built-in: G1140SCU, \$1599.

USING THE TABLE

indicates a newly tested model.

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Washing performance: 35%
- Drying performance: 25%
- Ease of use: 10%
- Energy efficiency: 15%
- Water efficiency: 15%

Noise All the dishwashers are fairly quiet, but there's a noticeable difference between the quietest (40 dB) and the loudest (54 dB).

Features For more on the features in the table, see CHOICE, July 2006, or go to choiceextra.com.au and click on Jul 06 under 'dishwashers' in the index. 

Water connection

- **H or C:** You can connect the dishwasher to hot or cold water.
- **C rec:** The manufacturer recommends connection to a cold tap, and the dishwasher heats the water itself (all dishwashers have a heater).
- **C only:** You can only connect to a cold tap.

Type

- **FW:** Freestanding, with a worktop (can generally be built-in as well).
- **BI:** Built-in (mightn't have top or side panels).

Some models are also available semi-integrated (you can fit a front panel to the door to match the rest of your kitchen cupboard doors) or fully integrated (the whole front of the machine can match your kitchen, with the controls hidden inside the door).

Running costs This is an estimate of how much it'll cost over 10 years for water and electricity if you wash a full load every day using a 'normal' or 'auto-sensing' cycle, based on 15 cents per kWh for electricity and \$1 per 1000 L of water.

Price Recommended retail as of November 2006.

Battery power

As readers of CHOICE will be well aware, the number of portable, high-tech gadgets that run on batteries has increased dramatically over the past few years. In response to all these power-hungry devices, battery manufacturers have come up with a number of high-capacity options to keep your gadgets going. The most popular are:

- **Rechargeable nickel metal hydride (NiMH) batteries:** Clearly the cheapest if you use your camera (or whatever) a lot. Manufacturers claim that some can be recharged up to 1000 times, but while this may be true, in our last test (March 2005) we found that for some models, how long the charge lasts decreases with use. To make the most of rechargeable batteries, make sure you use a charger designed for the type and capacity of battery you're using.
- **Lithium batteries:** These last the longest in high-drain devices like digital cameras and DVD players. If you want to use rechargeables but keep lithiums for emergencies, they should last OK: manufacturers say they have a shelf-life of around 10 years.
- **Other options:** There are other kinds of battery marketed as being designed for devices such as digital cameras. The most common of these is a high-capacity or premium alkaline. They're cheaper to buy than lithiums but don't last as long in use.

What's the best for you?

The short answer is that it depends on how much you use your high-tech devices. If you use your appliances a lot, rechargeable batteries are your best bet. Although they may be more expensive to buy initially, they're cheaper in the long run, perform very well and are better for the environment than non-rechargeables because you're not constantly throwing them away. Manufacturers are also continually bringing out new models with higher capacity (which means longer time in use).

Of course, one problem with these batteries is remembering to charge them. VARTA has come up with a 15-minute Charge&Go battery that allows a quick charge. However, it has a slightly lower capacity than the other rechargeables in the test and didn't last as long per charge as the top performers. The VARTA took an average of 270 photos before running out of power, while the best rechargeables took 470 or 480.

A normal charger for high-capacity NiMH batteries takes around 12–15 hours, but some also have a one-hour 'fast charge' option. We haven't tested whether fast charging has any effect on a battery's durability.

If you're likely to forget to recharge or will be trekking

through the rainforest on your next holiday and unable to recharge your batteries after a day of heavy snapping on your digital camera, you're better opting for a lithium battery. The ENERGIZER e² Lithium was by far the top performer in our test, taking an average of 620 photos before running out of power.

Lithium batteries work out more expensive than rechargeables when used over time, but they're more economical than most of the alkaline batteries, which have to be replaced more often. For example, in our test scenario the lowest-scoring alkaline batteries — the DSE Extra and PANASONIC — would require 167 sets of two batteries to take 10,000 photos. In comparison the ENERGIZER e² Lithium would need only 16 sets of two batteries to complete the same task. So the PANASONIC alkaline batteries would cost you \$580 for 10,000 digital photos, compared to \$160 for the ENERGIZER e² Lithium.

Lithium batteries are also a good bet if you don't use your battery-operated devices very often and don't want to bother recharging batteries.

MODEL

Brand / model (in rank order)	Type
Energizer e² Lithium	Lithium
Energizer Rechargeable 2500 mAh	NiMH (A)
Duracell Rechargeable 2650 mAh	NiMH (A)
Kodak Rechargeable Digital Camera 2500 mAh	NiMH (A)
DSE NiMH 2200 mAh	NiMH (A)
Fujifilm Rechargeable 2500 mAh	NiMH (A)
Varta 15 minute Charge&Go 2000 mAh	NiMH (A)
Inca AA Lithium	Lithium
GP Digi 1	Nickel zinc
Panasonic Oxyride	Oxy alkaline
Duracell Pix Power	Nickel oxy hydride
Kodak Digital Camera	Oxy alkaline
Memorex Energy	Alkaline
Eveready Gold	Alkaline
Energizer e² Advanced	Alkaline
Duracell Ultra	Alkaline
Sony Stamina Platinum	Alkaline
DSE Extra Alkaline	Alkaline
Panasonic Alkaline	Alkaline

IN A NUTSHELL

- Rechargeable batteries are the most economical option if you frequently use appliances that consume a lot of power, such as a digital camera.
- Lithium batteries lasted the longest in our test and are a good option if you'll be in a situation where you can't recharge.

Another option is to keep your eyes open for the GP Digi 1 nickel zinc battery. It's the cheapest non-rechargeable battery we tested (both for a set of two and per 10,000 photos taken) but unfortunately it's not widely available.

High-capacity or regular?

All devices that need AA batteries can use any of the batteries we tested. But:

- Rechargeable batteries lose their charge over time even if they're not used. So it's not a good idea to have them in devices you don't use often, like an emergency torch.
- Batteries designed for high-drain appliances (such as lithium and other high-capacity batteries) don't provide any advantage that would justify their higher price in devices that don't use much power, such as a remote control. It's probably more economical to use regular alkaline or zinc carbon batteries in these low-drain devices. ■

PERFORMANCE						COSTS	
Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Value score (%)	Number of shots per set of 2	Sets of 2 per 10,000 shots		Price (\$ set of two/four)	Cost for 10,000 shots (\$)
87	92	81	620	16		13.00	160
85	77	92	480	2		23.00	70
84	76	92	470	2		20.00	70
84	76	92	470	2		20.00	70
83	73	92	450	2		24.00	70
83	74	92	460	2		20.00	70
73	54	92	270	2		20.00	70
72	80	63	510	20		15.00	300
64	40	87	140	71		1.50	110
61	46	76	200	50		4.00	200
59	47	71	210	48		5.00	240
58	45	71	190	53		4.50	240
49	32	65	70	143		2.00	280
48	35	60	100	100		3.20	320
46	38	53	120	83		6.00	380
45	37	53	110	91		4.20	380
43	34	51	90	111		3.50	390
39	31	47	60	167		2.50	420
29	31	27	60	167		3.50	580



HOW WE TESTED

- We tested 10 samples of each of the 19 batteries using an international standard test that simulates the power used when taking a photo with a digital camera. We counted the number of photos each battery could take, and converted it to a performance score out of 100. While this is a good comparative test, in reality you're unlikely to get that many photos from each battery set because other things, such as zooming and leaving the display on, also use up the battery power, but aren't taken into account in this test.
- To find which battery is the best value, we calculated the cost for 10,000 shots, based on its performance in the above test and its purchase price, and converted that to a value score out of 100.



WHAT TO BUY

Rechargeable

	Set of 4
ENERGIZER Rechargeable 2500 mAh	\$23.00
DURACELL Rechargeable 2650 mAh	\$20.00
KODAK Rechargeable Digital Camera 2500 mAh	\$20.00
DSE NIMH 2200 mAh	\$24.00
FUJIFILM Rechargeable 2500 mAh	\$20.00

Non-rechargeable

	Set of 2
ENERGIZER e ³ Lithium	\$13.00



USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Performance score: 50%
- Value score: 50%

See *How we tested*, above, for more.

Number of shots: The average number we counted that were taken in the performance test.

Sets of two per 10,000 shots: The number of sets of two batteries needed to take 10,000 shots with a digital camera, based on our results.

Price for a set of two or four: The approximate price for two non-rechargeables or four rechargeables, rounded to the nearest five cents. We've listed the price for four rechargeables so you

can use one set while recharging the other.

Cost for 10,000 shots: This is what the value score is based on. Prices are rounded to the nearest \$10.

- For the non-rechargeables it's the number of sets of two batteries needed to take 10,000 shots multiplied by the cost of two batteries.
 - For the rechargeables we based the cost on two sets of two batteries and a \$50 charger. In fact you're likely to get a lot more than 10,000 shots from rechargeable batteries as you can charge them several hundred times, so this figure is something of a worst-case scenario. The cost is rounded to the nearest \$10.
- (A) Rechargeable.



Used car safety ratings assess how well a model protects its driver and other road users in a crash.

Used car safety

Many new car models offer sophisticated crash design and a range of safety equipment, such as front, side and head airbags, and intelligent restraint systems. But what if you're looking at an older car?

The latest used car safety ratings can help you make a decision. They're based on a study by the Monash University Accident Research Centre (and funded by state and federal road authorities and motoring organisations in Australia and New Zealand) that analysed about 1.7 million crashes between 1987 and 2004 on roads in NSW and Victoria, and between 1991 and 2004 in Queensland, WA and New Zealand. It's the world's largest study of on-road vehicle crashes.

The ratings look at 305 models manufactured between 1982 and 2004. They show the risk to the driver of being killed or admitted to hospital when in a crash (**crashworthiness**), and also how much the car endangers the driver of another vehicle or an unprotected road user (pedestrian, cyclist or motorcyclist) involved in the accident (**aggressivity**), compared to the average of all models.

The main findings

The results show some general trends:

- Larger and more expensive used cars usually offer better protection for their drivers — not least because safety equipment such as airbags and ABS brakes weren't commonly found in smaller and cheaper cars until recently.

For example, of the 22 large cars rated, 14 provide above average driver protection; only two are below average. The results for prestige cars are similar. In contrast, none of the light cars scored better than average.

- Heavy cars (such as large 4WDs and some large sedans) often have good crashworthiness but bad aggressivity due to simple physics (if a heavy car collides with a light one, the light one is usually worse off) or, in the case of 4WDs, to the higher ride height.
- The safety of a particular model often (but not always) improves over time due to better crash design (such as crumple zones, collapsible steering columns, reinforced door frames) and improved safety equipment (for example, airbags and seatbelt tensioners).

What to look for

If you're in the market for a used car, some of the above findings may not seem very helpful. You probably have a certain budget (so the safer luxury car may not be an option) and certain needs (for example, most of your driving may be done in the city, so a large 4WD wouldn't make much sense). So the used car safety ratings can only be part (albeit an important one) of your research to find the best model for you. Once you've decided on the best type of car for your needs, find the best model by comparing a range of aspects such as:

- **Repair costs** — the **NRMA Insurance** low-speed crash tests are regularly published in **CHOICE** (June 2005 and choiceextra.com.au have the latest results).
- **Safety** — as well as this latest real-life accident data, you can get safety info from the **ANCAP** high-speed lab crash tests (last published in **CHOICE**, July 2006, and on choiceextra.com.au).
- **Environmental rating** — the **Green Vehicle Guide** rates the fuel consumption and emissions of cars (www.greenvehicleguide.gov.au; also see **CHOICE**, September 2006).

IN A NUTSHELL

- Choosing a safe used car model could mean the difference between getting out of an accident with a fright or with a serious injury.
- The Subaru Forester compact 4WD (1997–2002) is the standout car in the study — it's the only model to score a double-tick for both crashworthiness and aggressivity.

Make/model/year (in order of crashworthiness within categories)	Crashworthiness	Aggressivity
LIGHT CARS		
Daewoo 1.5i 1994-95	o	na
Daewoo Cielo 1995-97	o	✓✓
Daewoo Matiz 1999-2004	o	o
Daihatsu Pyzar 1997-2001	o	✓
Daihatsu Sirion/Storia 1998-2004	o	✓✓
Ford Ka 1999-2004	o	na
Holden Barina XC 2001-04	o	✓✓
Kia Rio 2000-04	o	o
Mazda 121/Autozam Review 1994-96	o	✓✓
Mazda 121 Metro/Demio 1997-2002	o	✓✓
Peugeot 205 1987-94	o	na
Suzuki Ignis 2000-02	o	na
Toyota Echo 1999-2004	o	✓✓
VW Polo 1996-2000	o	o
Daewoo Lanos 1997-2003	X	o
Holden Barina SB 1995-2000	X	✓
Hyundai Accent 2000-04	X	✓
Toyota Starlet 1996-99	X	✓
Daihatsu Charade 1982-86	XX	✓
Daihatsu Charade 1988-92	XX	✓✓
Daihatsu Charade 1993-2000	XX	✓✓
Daihatsu Mira 1990-96	XX	✓
Ford Festiva WD/WH/WF 1994-2001	XX	✓✓
Ford/Mazda Festiva WA/121 1987-90	XX	✓✓
Holden/Suzuki Barina/Swift/Cultus 1986-88	XX	✓✓
Holden/Suzuki Barina/Swift/Cultus 1989-99	XX	✓✓
Honda City 1983-86	XX	o
Hyundai Getz 2002-04	XX	o
Hyundai Excel 1986-90	XX	o

Hyundai Excel 1990-94	XX	✓
Hyundai Excel/Accent 1995-2000	XX	✓
Mitsubishi Mirage/Colt 1982-88	XX	✓
Nissan Micra 1995-97	XX	o
Subaru Sherpa/Flori/700/Rex 1989-92	XX	✓
Suzuki Alto 1985-2000	XX	na
Suzuki Hatch/Alto 1982-84	XX	o
Suzuki Swift 1982-85	XX	na
SMALL CARS		
Peugeot 306 1994-2001	✓✓	o
Toyota Corolla 1998-2001	✓✓	✓
VW Golf/Bora 1999-2004	✓✓	o
Holden Astra TR 1996-98	✓	o
Holden Astra TS 1998-2004	✓	✓
Honda Civic/Shuttle 1988-91	✓	✓
Alfa Romeo 33 1983-92	o	✓✓
Chrysler Neon 1996-99	o	✓
Daewoo Nubira 1997-2003	o	✓
Daihatsu Applause 1989-99	o	✓
Fiat Regata 1984-88	o	na
Ford Focus 2002-04	o	o
Ford Laser 1991-94	o	✓
Ford Laser 1995-97	o	o
Ford/Mazda Laser/323 1999-2003	o	✓
Honda Civic 1992-95	o	o
Honda Civic 1996-2000	o	✓✓
Honda Civic 2001-04	o	o
Honda Concerto 1989-93	o	o
Hyundai Elantra 2000-04	o	o
Hyundai Lantra 1991-95	o	o
Hyundai Lantra 1996-2000	o	o
Mazda 323/Familia/Lantis 1990-93	o	✓✓
Mazda 323/Familia/Lantis 1995-98	o	✓✓
Mitsubishi Lancer/Mirage CA 1989-90	o	✓
Mitsubishi Lancer/Mirage CB 1991-92	o	o
Mitsubishi Lancer/Mirage CC 1993-95	o	✓✓

Mitsubishi Lancer/Mirage CE 1996-2003	o	✓
Nissan Pulsar/Vector/Sentra 1992-95	o	✓
Nissan Pulsar/Vector/Sentra 1996-99	o	✓
Nissan Pulsar 2000-04	o	o
Nissan Stanza 1982-83	o	o
Proton Wira 1995-96	o	o
Renault 19 1991-96	o	na
Rover Quintet 1982-86	o	na
Subaru Impreza 1993-2000	o	o
Subaru Impreza 2001-04	o	o
Suzuki Baleno/Cultus Crescent 1995-2002	o	✓✓
Toyota Corolla 2002-04	o	o
Toyota Corolla 4WD Wagon 1992-96	o	na
Toyota/Holden Corolla/Nova 1994-97	o	✓✓
Toyota Tercel 1983-88	o	o
VW Golf 1995-98	o	o
Holden Gemini RB 1986-87	X	o
Holden/Nissan Astra/Pulsar/Vector/Sentra 1988-90	X	✓
Honda Civic 1982-83	X	✓✓
Hyundai S Coupé 1990-96	X	✓✓
Toyota Corolla 1986-88	X	✓
Toyota/Holden Corolla/Nova 1989-93	X	✓
VW Golf 1982-94	X	na
Ford/Mazda Laser/323/Familia 1982-88	XX	✓✓
Holden Gemini 1982-84	XX	✓
Holden/Nissan Astra/Pulsar/Langley 1984-86	XX	✓
Honda Civic/Ballade/Shuttle 1984-87	XX	✓
Mitsubishi Cordia 1983-87	XX	X
Toyota Corolla 1982-84	XX	✓✓
MEDIUM CARS		
Ford Mondeo 1995-2001	✓✓	o
Holden Vectra 1997-2003	✓✓	o
Subaru Liberty/Legacy/Outback 1999-2003	✓✓	o

USING THE TABLE

Sometimes a car model changes category over the years as its specifications change (for example, the TOYOTA Camry has moved from medium to large car). So if you can't find the car you're looking for where you'd expect to find it, try looking at a few other categories.

In addition, some year models of some cars may be missing, due to lack of sufficient data for them.

And of course as the number of models and crashes included in the study grows, the average against which models are rated changes, so a model won't necessarily be rated the same from one report to the next.

Crashworthiness This rating shows how well the car prevents serious injury to the driver in an accident (compared to the average of all the rated cars):

- ✓✓ Much better protection than average.
- ✓ Better protection than average.
- o Average protection.
- X Worse protection than average.
- XX Much worse protection than average.

Aggressivity This shows the injury risk the vehicle poses to the driver of another car, and to unprotected road users, in an accident (compared to the average

of all the rated cars). Ideally, a car should minimise harm not only to its own occupants, but also to those of other cars and other road users.

- ✓✓ Much better protection than average.
- ✓ Better protection than average.
- o Average protection.
- X Worse protection than average.
- XX Much worse protection than average.

na Not applicable: no rating possible — insufficient data.

Source: Monash University Accident Research Centre, published June 2006.



Make/model/year (in order of crashworthiness within categories, continued)	Crashworthiness	Aggressivity
Ford/Mazda Telstar/626/MX6/Capella/Cronos 1992-97	✓	✓
Nissan Bluebird 1993-97	✓	✓
Subaru Liberty/Legacy 1989-93	✓	o
Subaru Liberty/Legacy/Outback 1994-98	✓	o
Daewoo Leganza 1997-2004	o	o
Ford/Mazda Telstar/626/MX6/Capella 1983-86	o	✓
Ford/Mazda Telstar/626/MX6/Capella 1988-91	o	o
Holden/Toyota Apollo JK/JL/ Camry/Vista 1988-92	o	o
Mazda 626 1998-2002	o	o
Mitsubishi Galant 1995-96	o	o
Nissan Pintara 1986-88	o	o
Toyota Camry 1983-86	o	o
Daewoo Espero 1995-97	X	o
Mitsubishi Sigma/Galant/Sapporo/Lambda 1982-84	X	✓
Nissan/Ford Pintara/Corsair/Bluebird 1989-92	X	o
Subaru 1800/Leone/Omega/4WD Wagon 1982-93	X	✓
Toyota Corona 1982-88	X	✓
Holden Camira 1982-89	XX	o
Nissan Bluebird 1982-86	XX	✓
LARGE CARS		
Ford Falcon AU 1998-2002	✓✓	o
Ford Falcon EF/EL 1994-98	✓✓	X
Holden Commodore VT/VX 1997-2002	✓✓	X
Holden Commodore VY/VZ 2002-04	✓✓	o
Holden/Toyota Commodore VR/V5/Lexcen 1993-97	✓✓	o
Toyota Camry 1998-2002	✓✓	X
Ford Falcon BA 2002-04	✓	o
Ford Falcon EA/Falcon EB Series I 1988-Mar 92	✓	X
Ford Falcon EB Series II/Falcon ED Apr 1992-94	✓	X
Holden/Toyota Apollo JM/JP/ Camry/Sceptor 1993-97	✓	o
Mitsubishi Magna TE/TF/TH/TJ/Verada KE/KF/KH/KJ/Diamante 1996-2003	✓	o
Mitsubishi Magna TR/TS/Verada KR/KS/V3000/Diamante 1991-96	✓	o
Toyota Avalon 2000-04	✓	X
Toyota Camry 2002-04	✓	o
Ford Falcon XE/XF 1982-88	o	X
Ford Taurus 1996-98	o	o

Holden/Toyota Commodore VN/VP/Lexcen 1989-93	o	✓
Hyundai Sonata 1989-97	o	o
Hyundai Sonata 1998-2001	o	o
Nissan Skyline 1983-88	o	o
Holden Commodore VB-VL 1982-88	X	o
Mitsubishi Magna TM/TN/TP/Sigma/V3000 1985-90	X	o
PRESTIGE CARS		
BMW 3 Series E46 1999-2004	✓✓	o
BMW 5 Series E39 1996-2004	✓✓	o
Holden Statesman/Caprice WH 1999-2003	✓✓	o
Honda Legend 1986-95	✓✓	o
Peugeot 406 1996-2004	✓✓	na
Saab 9000 1986-97	✓✓	o
Volvo 700/900 Series 1984-92	✓✓	o
VW Passat 1998-2004	✓✓	na
BMW 3 Series E30 1982-91	✓	o
BMW 3 Series E36 1992-98	✓	o
Ford Fairlane N/LTD D 1988-94	✓	o
Honda Accord 1986-90	✓	o
Honda Accord 1991-93	✓	✓✓
Honda Accord 1994-98	✓	o
Honda Accord 1999-2002	✓	o
Jaguar XJ6 1987-94	✓	o
Mazda 929/Sentia/Efini MS-9 1992-96	✓	na
Mercedes Benz C-Class W202 1995-2000	✓	✓
Mercedes Benz E-Class W124 1986-94	✓	o
Mercedes Benz E-Class W210 1996-2002	✓	o
Nissan Maxima/Cefiro 1995-99	✓	o
Peugeot 505 1982-93	✓	o
Saab 900/9-3 1994-2002	✓	o
Toyota Cressida/Mark II 1989-93	✓	o
Volvo 200 Series 1982-93	✓	o
Volvo 850/S70/V70/C70 1992-2004	✓	X
Audi A4 1995-2001	o	o
BMW 5 Series E28 1982-88	o	o
BMW 5 Series E34 1989-95	o	o
Ford Fairlane/LTD AU 1999-2002	o	o
Ford Fairlane N/LTD D 1995-98	o	o
Ford Fairlane Z/LTD F 1982-87	o	o
Holden Statesman/Caprice VQ 1990-93	o	o
Holden Statesman/Caprice VR/V5 1994-98	o	o
Holden Statesman/Caprice WB 1982-85	o	na
Jaguar XJ6 1982-86	o	XX
Lexus ES300/Windows 1992-2001	o	o
Mazda 929/Luce 1982-90	o	o
Mercedes Benz C-Class W201 1987-93	o	o

Mercedes Benz E-Class W123 1982-85	o	na
Mercedes Benz S-Class W126 1982-92	o	o
Nissan Maxima 1990-94	o	o
Peugeot 405 1989-97	o	o
Saab 900 Series 1982-92	o	✓✓
Toyota Crown/Cressida/Mark II 1982-85	o	o
Toyota Crown/Cressida/Mark II 1986-88	o	o
Volvo 300 Series 1984-88	o	na
Volvo 540/V40 1997-2004	o	o
Honda Accord 1982-85	X	✓✓
SPORTS CARS		
Honda Prelude 1997-2002	✓✓	o
Honda Integra 1990-92	✓	o
Honda Integra 1993-2001	✓	o
Holden Calibra 1994-97	o	o
Honda CRX 1992-98	o	na
Honda Integra 1986-88	o	✓
Honda Prelude 1983-91	o	o
Honda Prelude 1992-96	o	o
Mazda Eunos 30X/Presso/MX-3/Autozam AZ-3 1990-97	o	o
Mazda MX5/Eunos Roadster 1989-97	o	o
Mazda RX7 1986-91	o	o
Nissan 200SX/Silvia 1994-2002	o	o
Nissan 300ZX/Fairlady Z 1990-95	o	X
Nissan Exa 1987-91	o	o
Renault Fuego 1982-87	o	✓✓
Toyota Celica 1981-85	o	o
Toyota Celica 1986-89	o	o
Toyota Celica 1990-93	o	o
Toyota Celica 1994-99	o	o
Toyota MR2 1991-2000	o	na
Toyota Paseo/Cynos 1991-99	o	o
Alfa Romeo GTV 1982-84	X	na
Ford Capri 1989-94	X	✓
Mazda RX7 1982-85	X	o
Nissan Gazelle/Silvia 1984-86	X	o
Toyota Supra 1982-90	X	XX
Honda CRX 1987-91	XX	o
Hyundai Coupe 1996-2000	XX	o
Mitsubishi Starion 1982-87	XX	na
Nissan Exa 1983-86	XX	X
Nissan NX/NX-R 1991-96	XX	o
Toyota MR2 1987-90	XX	na
COMPACT 4WDs		
Honda CR-V 1997-2001	✓✓	✓
Honda CR-V 2002-04	✓✓	o
Subaru Forester 1997-2002	✓✓	✓✓
Subaru Forester 2002-04	✓✓	na
Toyota RAV4 1994-2000	✓	o

Toyota RAV4 2001-04	✓	o
Daihatsu Feroza/Rocky 1989-97	o	o
Daihatsu Terios 1997-2004	o	✓
Honda HR-V 1999-2002	o	X
Lada Niva 1984-99	o	o
Nissan X-Trail 2001-04	o	na
Suzuki Vitara/Escudo 1988-98	o	o
Daihatsu Rocky/Rugger 1985-98	XX	X
Holden/Suzuki DRover/Sierra/Samurai/SJ410/SJ413 1982-99	XX	o
MEDIUM 4WDs		
Mitsubishi Pajero 1992-99	✓✓	X
Holden/Isuzu Jackaroo/Bighorn 1982-91	✓	XX
Jeep Cherokee XJ 1996-2000	✓	o
Land Rover Discovery 1991-2002	✓	o
Mitsubishi Pajero NM/NP 2000-04	✓	na
Holden/Isuzu Jackaroo/Bighorn 1992-97	o	o
Holden/Isuzu Jackaroo/Bighorn 1998-2002	o	o
Land Rover Defender 1992-2004	o	o
Mitsubishi Challenger 1998-2004	o	na
Mitsubishi Pajero 1982-90	o	XX
Nissan Pathfinder/Terrano 1988-94	o	X
Nissan Pathfinder/Terrano 1995-2002	o	o
LARGE 4WDs		
Land Rover Range Rover 1982-94	✓✓	XX
Nissan Patrol/Safari 1998-2004	✓✓	XX
Nissan/Ford Patrol/Maverick/Safari 1988-97	✓✓	XX
Toyota Landcruiser 1990-97	✓✓	XX
Toyota Landcruiser 1998-2004	✓✓	XX
Ford Explorer 2000-01	o	o
Nissan Patrol/Safari 1982-87	o	XX
Toyota Landcruiser 1982-89	o	XX
PEOPLE MOVERS		
Kia Carnival 1999-2004	✓✓	✓
Chrysler Voyager 1997-2004	✓	X
Toyota Tarago/Prevvia/Estima 1991-99	✓	o
Honda Odyssey 1995-2000	o	o
Mitsubishi Nimbus/Chariot/Spacewagon 1985-91	o	o
Mitsubishi Nimbus/Chariot 1992-98	o	o
Mitsubishi Starwagon/Delica Spacegear 1995-98	o	o
Mitsubishi Starwagon/Delica Spacegear 1998-2004	o	o
Nissan Prairie 1984-86	o	o
Mitsubishi Starwagon/Delica Starwagon 1987-93	X	XX
Mitsubishi Starwagon/L300 1983-86	XX	XX
Toyota Tarago 1983-89	XX	o

VANS		
Ford Falcon Panel Van 1996-99	✓✓	o
VW Caravelle/Transporter 1995-2004	✓✓	XX
Toyota Hiace/Liteace 1996-2004	✓	XX
Ford Falcon Panel Van 1982-95	o	o
Ford Transit 1995-2000	o	o
Honda Acty 1983-86	o	✓
Toyota Hiace/Liteace 1990-95	o	XX
Toyota Hiace/Liteace 1987-89	X	XX
Daihatsu Handivan 1982-90	XX	✓
Daihatsu Hi-Jet 1982-90	XX	na
Holden Shuttle/WFR Van 1982-87	XX	o
Holden/Suzuki Scurry/Carry 1982-2000	XX	o
Toyota Hiace/Liteace 1982-86	XX	XX
UTES		
Ford Falcon Ute AU 2000-02	✓✓	X
Holden Rodeo 2003-04	✓✓	o
Ford Falcon Ute 1996-99	✓	X
Holden Commodore Ute VR/V5 1994-2000	✓	X
Holden Rodeo 1996-98	✓	X
Holden Rodeo 1999-2002	✓	X
Nissan Navara 1992-96	✓	X
Nissan Navara 1997-2004	✓	X
Toyota Hilux 1988-2002	✓	XX
Ford Falcon Ute BA 2003-04	o	na
Ford F-Series 1982-92	o	XX
Ford/Mazda Courier/B-Series/Bounty 1998-2002	o	o
Ford/Nissan Falcon Ute/XFN Ute 1982-95	o	X
Holden Commodore Ute VG/VP 1990-93	o	o
Holden Commodore Ute VY/VZ 2002-04	o	XX
Holden Commodore Ute Ute 2000-02	o	X
Holden/Isuzu Rodeo/Pickup 1982-85	o	o
Holden/Isuzu Rodeo/Pickup 1986-88	o	o
Holden/Isuzu Rodeo/Pickup 1989-95	o	XX
Kia Ceres 1992-2000	o	o
Nissan 720 Ute 1982-85	o	o
Nissan Navara 1986-91	o	X
Toyota 4runner/Hilux 1982-85	o	XX
Toyota 4runner/Hilux 1986-88	o	XX
Toyota 4runner/Hilux 1989-97	o	XX
Holden WB Series 1982-85	X	X
Subaru Brumby 1982-92	XX	o
Suzuki Mighty Boy 1985-88	XX	✓

Our campaign priorities



Gordon Renouf,
Policy and Campaigns Manager

CHOICE has been campaigning for consumers since 1959. What we've achieved is set out in *Where would you be without CHOICE?*, available on choice.com.au or by phoning us (02 9577 3399).

With limited resources we have to choose our campaigns carefully. We rely on your feedback and select the issues we think matter to consumers and where we can achieve the greatest benefit for you. Six of our key 2007 priorities are described here

— there's a full list on our website at choice.com.au/campaigns.

- **Children's nutrition and obesity** As parents battle to keep their kids' diet healthy, we're encouraging food manufacturers to reduce fat, sugar and kilojoules in children's foods. We're also campaigning for restrictions on unhealthy food promotions targeting children.
- **Product safety** Our tests often uncover unsafe and potentially harmful products. We need better voluntary and mandatory product safety standards. A legislated 'general safety' requirement would put a clear obligation on manufacturers to ensure products are safe before they reach you. Maybe you're surprised this law doesn't exist already in a developed country like Australia — we are.
- **Unethical drug marketing** Marketing costs add an average of 35% to the price of medicines. Drug companies have been known to push their products through 'winning and dining' doctors and use dubious tactics to get around the ban on advertising prescription medicines directly to consumers. We want to see greater scrutiny of pharmaceutical marketing, its impact on

the treatment you get and the cost to the healthcare system.

- **Multiple superannuation accounts** There are 2.6 super accounts for every Australian worker. Consumers are paying more than \$1 billion in unnecessary fees each year. We're campaigning to make it easier for you to consolidate accounts.
 - **New laws to tackle unjust contract terms** Have you ever signed up with a mobile phone provider, gym or other business only to find you got a raw deal because of terms and conditions in the fine print? Victoria has introduced effective laws that prohibit unjust terms in consumer contracts. We're campaigning to extend them to all other states and territories.
 - **Enforcement by regulatory agencies** Consumer protection depends on effective enforcement of laws. We're reviewing the performance of consumer affairs agencies and will lobby for them all to adopt best practice.
- To really achieve change for consumers we need your support. Keep up to date with our campaign work and our calls to action — subscribe to CHOICE Campaigns Update newsletter. It's free — go to choice.com.au/ccu. ■

IDOLISING weight loss

XENICAL, an effective weight-loss medication for some very overweight/obese adults, became available as a 'pharmacist only' drug in 2003 — which means you can buy it over-the-counter at a pharmacy without a prescription. Permission for brand-name advertising was granted in June 2006.

In October 2006 ads for XENICAL were aired during Channel 10's *Australian Idol* — watched by more than 140,000 teenagers. Advertising like this suggests the drug could be appropriate for anyone who thinks they have a weight problem, which isn't the case. We have anecdotal evidence that pharmacists have been asked for the drug by girls as young as 13 with a perfectly healthy weight.

Following our complaint to the Therapeutic Goods Advertising Code Council the manufacturer, Roche, was required to withdraw the ad and "the unqualified representation that



XENICAL is suitable for anyone who wants to lose weight."

CHOICE has written to the National Drugs and Poisons Schedule Committee asking that advertising approval for XENICAL be withdrawn and it be changed back to a 'prescription only' medication, so that anyone considering taking it gets the benefit of medical advice rather than self-medicating.

FOOD Manassen Foods has recalled **Globus dill cucumbers**, in a 680 g glass jar with a red screwtop lid, with a use-by date of 10-07-2008 and lot code number 60641.

The problem It may contain glass fragments.

What to do Don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information contact Manassen Foods Australia, Lot 10 Henderson Road, Rowville 3178.

BICYCLE The ACCC has accepted a court-enforceable undertaking from Hagemeyer, which operates Lawrence & Hanson and Auslec stores, regarding the supply of **80 Lawrence & Hanson mountain bicycles**. The unassembled bikes were supplied free as part of a promotional offer between October 2005 and May 2006. They're black with 26 inch wheels and Shimano gears.

The problem The bikes don't comply with the mandatory product safety standard, as they didn't contain a warning that they aren't designed for off-road or stunting, there was no warning on the packaging recommending it should be assembled by a skilled bicycle mechanic, the bicycle was supplied with inadequate assembly, maintenance and use instructions, and the handbrakes were located on the wrong sides of the handlebar.

What to do Return the bike to any Auslec or Lawrence & Hanson store. Hagemeyer will replace the bicycle with one of equivalent value that complies with the standard. You may also be able to claim costs incurred — contact Hagemeyer on 1300 300 254 for further information.

POWER OUTLET Clipsal has recalled the four-gang white plastic series **power outlet**, sold in Australia between 27 July 2006 and 22 August 2006, product number C2015D4.

The problem The red and green terminal identification may have been reversed during manufacture.

What to do If you've already used the outlet and the attached appliances are working, the power point should be safe, but to make sure, contact Clipsal on 1800 198 015 between 6 am and 10 pm AEDST to arrange an inspection. If you haven't used it yet, or have tried and the attached appliances didn't work, it's a safety hazard. Don't touch any appliance that's connected to the power outlet, and contact Clipsal on the above number immediately. Clipsal will contact wholesalers who have purchased this product.

BABY RATTLE SET Jester Imports has recalled a 10-piece **baby rattle set** in a yellow box, item number 1001AB, sold between August 2005 and August 2006.

The problem It contains small parts that pose a choking risk for young children.

What to do Remove it from the reach of young children. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 03 9387 0381.

TOY Fantastic has recalled **Leapfrog Learn-Around Playground Activity Centre**, a multi-coloured plastic musical activity centre for young children aged 6–36 months. It includes a slide-and-sing alphabet panel and a ball drop on the left panel, a number rock musical keyboard in the centre, a flying rhymes panel, pop-up LittleLeap and a 'smart' book on the right side. 'Leapfrog Baby' is printed on the activity centre, and item number 10200 is moulded underneath the table, below the words 'Made in China'. It was sold through Kmart, Myer, Toys R Us and independent retail stores between March 2006 and September 2006.

The problem A child's arm may get caught in the plastic tube, causing injury.

What to do If the manufacture code, (located just above the battery compartment) ends in the letter 'G', the centre is safe to continue using. Otherwise, remove it from the reach of young children. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1800 660 655 or 1800 244 543 between 9 am and 4.30 pm AEDST, Monday to Friday, or email info@fantastic.com.au to receive a free repair kit.

TOY Anything Sales and Marketing has recalled the **Wooden Clock Puzzle**, with Australian Product Numbers 9329247008879 and 9329247002778, sold through Kmart and direct marketing companies.

The problem The number '7' may pose a choking risk to young children.

What to do Remove it from the reach of young children. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call

02 9557 3666, 9 am to 5 pm AEDST, Monday to Friday.

BUNK BEDS Furniture Galore has recalled **Fantasy Bus bunk beds**.

The problem The mattress base panels aren't fixed to the cross-rails they rest on, and are able to be dislodged. The opening in the guard rail at the rear of the bunk is too wide, and the effective height of the safety guard rail is too low when the upper bunk is fitted with a mattress any deeper than 105 mm. The 'portholes' could pose a strangulation risk for children if they attempt to put their head through the gap.

What to do Return it to the place of purchase, or contact your nearest Furniture Galore store to arrange collection. The manufacturer will modify the bed to ensure it's safe, and deliver it free of charge. A refund is available if preferred.

TYRE SEALANT Protek Australia has recalled **Protex tyre sealant**, batch number 6101002, sold between 7 March 2005 and 17 May 2006 in the Sydney metropolitan area.

The problem A component of the tyre sealant has exceeded its shelf life, and the sealant won't work as specified and may no longer seal punctures.

What to do Drivers of vehicles who have installed the sealant should drive at speeds below 80 km/h to minimise vibration until the product has been replaced. Call Protek on 1300 776 839 to schedule a time and place for the product to be removed and replaced.

HEATER Yale Prima has recalled **Prima Ceramic Fan Heater**, model PTC902, batches 6821 and 6911, sold between February 2006 and the beginning of September 2006.

The problem The fan may cease to operate, causing the ceramic element to overheat and ignite the plastic casing.

What to do Stop using it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 1300 366 155.

PRESSURE SPRAYER Mitre 10 has recalled **Buy Right 5 L pressure sprayer**, an opaque canister with a black and red pump handle, and a yellow wand.

The problem When under pressure,

the canister may rupture, resulting in canister particles being propelled and/or the contents being expelled.

What to do Stop using the sprayer and return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

CHAINSAW Techtronic Industries has recalled **Homelite Bandit 33 cc petrol chainsaw**, model UT10510, EAN 4960673420559, with a bar size of 356 mm. It's been sold in Mitre 10 stores since 11 September 2006.

The problem It doesn't comply with the Australian standard, as it doesn't have a chain brake.

What to do Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1300 361 505 for more information.

PUMP Grundfos has recalled the following **Grundfos CH-PC pumps**: model CH2-30PC, part number 91340615; model CH2-40PC, part number 91340616; model CH2-50PC, part number 91340617; model CH2-60PC, part number 91344120; model CH4-40PC, part number 91340647; model CH4-50PC, part number 91340658; and model CH4-60PC, part number 91340659. All models have a production date of P10621 to P10634 inclusive.

The problem A live wire has been connected to the earth within the pump.

What to do Don't use it. Grundfos will contact customers to identify potential faulty pumps, or contact your Grundfos dealer.

CANDLES Spotlight has recalled 25 and 50-pack tealights and 9-pack **Amalfi coloured plastic cup tealight candles**, sold in Spotlight stores since October 2005.

The problem They don't comply with a NSW product safety order, as they ignite if subjected to the flame of a candle, and pose a risk of fire.

What to do Don't use them. Return them to your nearest Spotlight store for a refund, or for more information call 03 9690 8899.

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HARD/word

The prize for the best entry goes to W & M Preston for the police auction. Thanks also to D Ambrose, G Kalwig, R Parkinson-Bates, A Sutcliffe and J Vertigan for their contributions to this month's Hard Word. Please keep them coming.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to The Hard Word, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204. Please don't email us your entries — we need the originals.

Be very careful where you put this one or ...



WARNING

Failure to follow instructions may result in bum injury.

Including enough fibre in our diets can sometimes be a challenge. To help you get the recommended level of 30g of fibre per day try this delicious tasting recipe.

High Fibre Banana Smoothie

- 1½ cup Uddle Tobys Bran Plus
- 2 tablespoons low fat natural yoghurt
- 1-2 tablespoons honey (to taste)
- 180ml cold low fat or soy milk
- Nutmeg (optional)

Method

1. Place all ingredients, except nutmeg, into a blender and blend until smooth.
2. Pour into a tall glass, sprinkle with nutmeg if required and serve immediately.

WE KNOW THEY'RE EXPENSIVE NOWADAYS ...

... but isn't there something missing from this banana smoothie recipe?

Ladies, if you're suffering from that dreaded condition, *aloe vera*, then this razor's for you ...



COP THIS AUCTION!

How much would you expect to pay for your very own police officer? There'd be a few gems available for sure ...

